

“The Last of Us”: Could Fungi Spell Doom? (Broadcast)

INTRO:

CREATING A POST-APOCALYPTIC WORLD – HBO’S “THE LAST OF US” INTRODUCES VIEWERS TO WHAT LIFE COULD LOOK LIKE WHEN A FUNGAL INFECTION SPREADS ACROSS THE GLOBE.

INFECTING THE FOOD SUPPLY – THE SHOW... BASED ON A VIDEO GAME... INFERS THAT THE FUNGI CORDYCEPS HAVE MUTATED AND QUICKLY SPREAD TO HUMANS.

TAKE VO

CORDYCEPS ARE A REAL-LIFE GROUP OF FUNGI WHICH HAS HUNDREDS OF SPECIES. IT CAN INFECT CERTAIN INSECTS... LIKE ANTS AND TARANTULAS... BY BECOMING PARASITES. SHOWRUNNERS TAKE THIS IDEA AND APPLY IT TO HUMANS IN “THE LAST OF US.”

BUT IS THIS SCENARIO REALISTIC? DR. SHARJEEL AHMAD... AN INFECTIOUS DISEASE SPECIALIST WITH OSF HEALTHCARE... SAYS “NO.” BUT A MORE COMPLEX PERSPECTIVE IS NEEDED... DR. AHMAD STRESSES. WHICH SHOULD INCLUDE BEING AWARE OF COMMON FUNGAL INFECTIONS THAT ARE POSSIBLE IN HUMANS. HUMAN’S BODY TEMPERATURES OFFER PROTECTION AGAINST CORDYCEPS... WHICH CAN’T SURVIVE IN THAT HIGH OF TEMPERATURES. CERTAIN FUNGAL INFECTIONS CAN HAPPEN IN PEOPLE WITH PRE-EXISTING LUNG DAMAGE... OR HAVE A WEAKENED IMMUNE SYSTEM.

TAKE SOT | DR. SHARJEEL AHMAD | INFECTIOUS DISEASE SPECIALIST | OSF HEALTHCARE

"The human mind is very, very complex and is a different beast than an insect's brain. That kind of specialization, for the fungi to adapt and parasitize a human mind, controlling something as complex as the human cerebral cortex versus the brain of an insect, needs a high degree of adaptation and evolution. That does not happen quickly," Dr. Ahmad says.

VO TAG

THE HISTOPLASMA FUNGUS IS MUCH MORE COMMON IN THE MIDWEST... DR. AHMAD SAYS. HISTOPLASMOSIS CAN HAPPEN IN THOSE WHO WORK OUTSIDE OFTEN AND INHALE SPORES... WHO MIGHT HAVE A WEAKENED IMMUNE SYSTEM.

“THE LAST OF US” SEASON TWO PREMIERES ON MAX APRIL 13TH. DR. AHMAD SAYS WHILE THE SHOW IS FICTIONAL... THE INCREASED ATTENTION TO THE RISING THREAT OF FUNGAL INFECTIONS IS A POSITIVE THING.