

Blastomycosis

Blastomycosis is a Class C Disease and must be reported to the state within five business days.

Blastomycosis is caused by the fungus *Blastomyces dermatitidis*. In the United States, it can be mainly found in the Midwestern, South-Central, and Southeastern states; especially in areas surrounding the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys, the Great Lakes, and the Saint Lawrence River. Infection is acquired through inhalation of conidia (fungal spores) from soil. About half of those infected with blastomycosis will experience symptoms, which are similar to flu symptoms, including fever, chills, cough, muscle aches, joint pain, and chest pain. Symptoms appear between 3 weeks to 3 months after a person breathes in the spores. In some cases blastomycosis can disseminate to other parts of the body including the skin and bones. The organism originates in the environment, and there is no person-to-person or animal-to-person transmission.

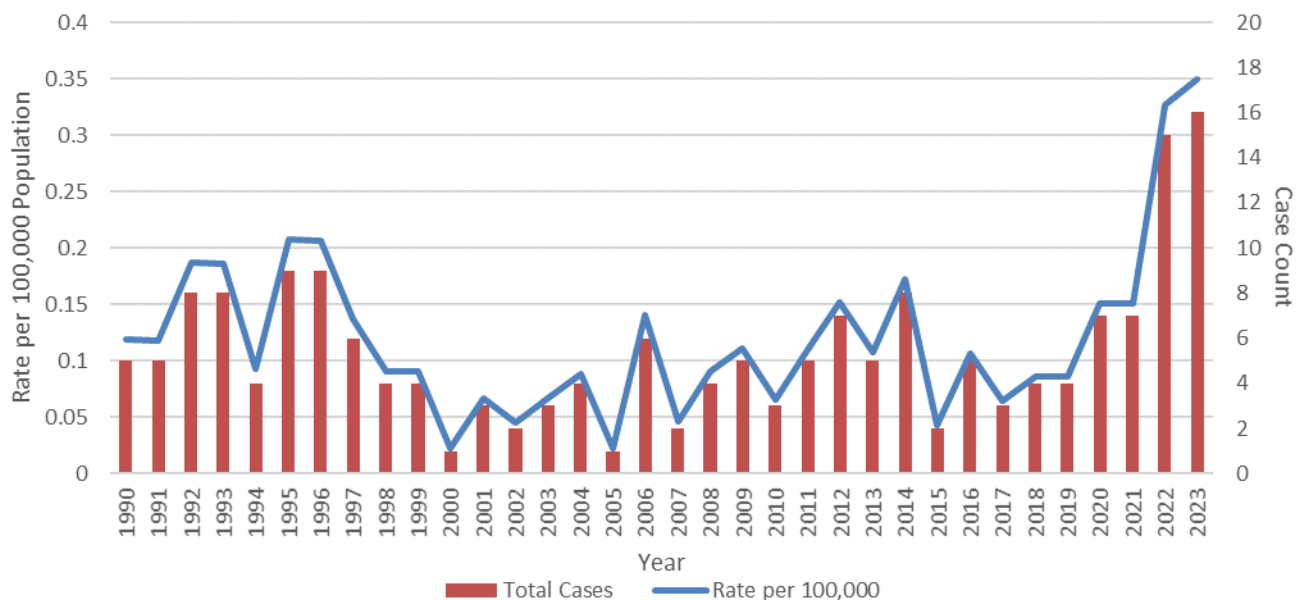
Diagnosis of blastomycosis primarily relies on identifying the organism through smear or culture of tissue or exudate samples. Because spontaneous resolution is rare, all patients should be treated with antifungal therapy. Currently, no vaccine is available.

Risk of infection may be greater for individuals with underlying medical conditions, such as diabetes, as well as individuals who engage in activities exposing them to wooded areas, such as farmers, forestry workers, hunters, and campers. Those with weakened immune systems may consider avoiding wooded areas where blastomycosis is endemic.

Incidence

Infection occurs sporadically in Louisiana, with annual case counts ranging from one to 16. In 2023, the state reported its highest number to date, with 16 confirmed cases (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Blastomycosis Case Count - Louisiana, 1990-2023



Blastomycosis also occurs sporadically in dogs in Louisiana, particularly in large breeds that live near large bodies of water. The southeastern U.S., and the Mississippi and Ohio River Valleys report the highest incidence of canine cases in the United States.

Sex, Race and Age

Of cases reported in Louisiana, the highest number occurred in individuals aged 65 and older (Figure 2). However, the 10-year incidence rate was highest in the 45–54 and 55–64 age groups, respectively (Figure 3). Over time, Black or African American individuals have experienced a higher incidence rate compared to White individuals (Figure 4).

Figure 2: Blastomycosis Case Counts by Age, Louisiana 1990-2023

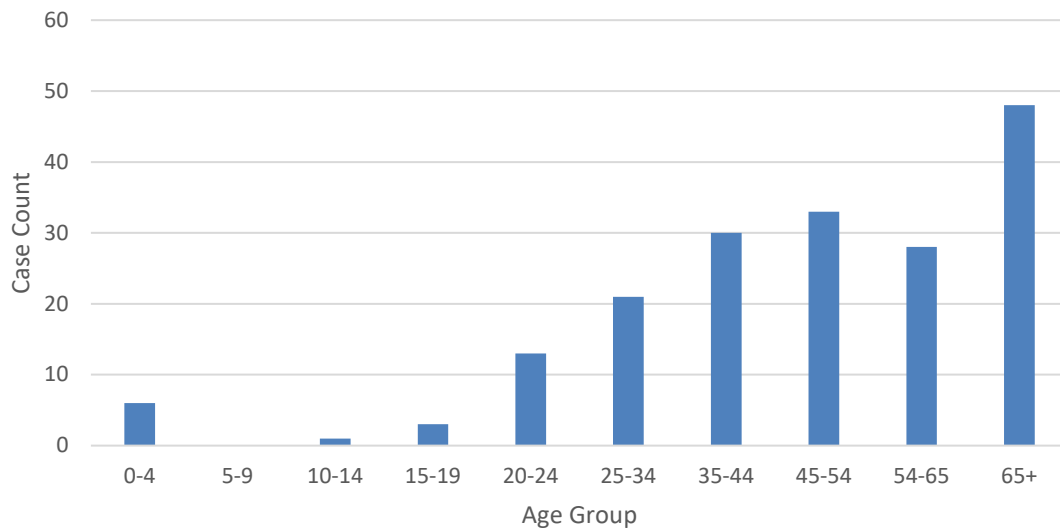


Figure 3: Blastomycosis 10 Year Incidence Rates by Age - Louisiana, 2014-2023

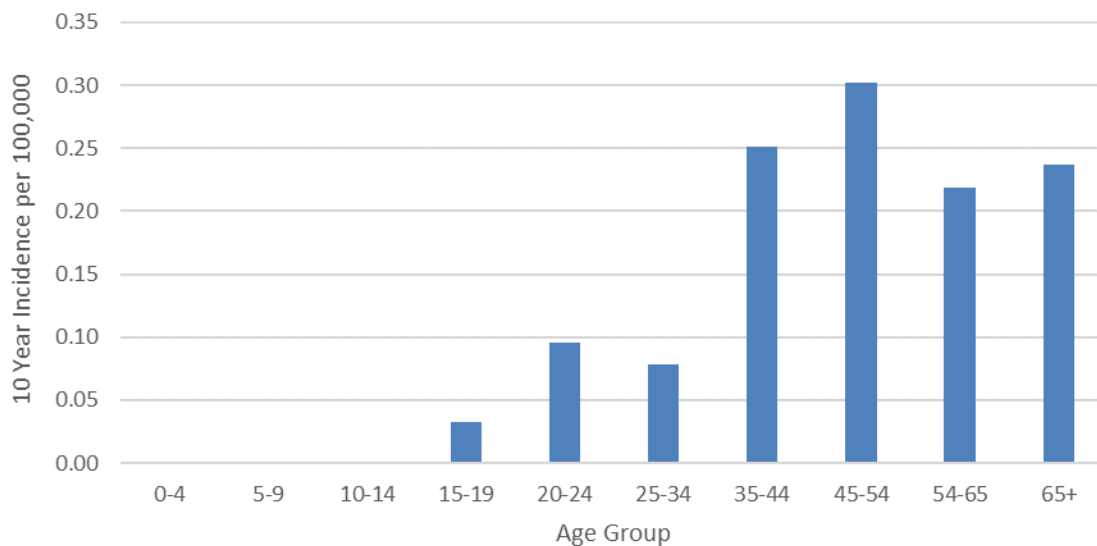
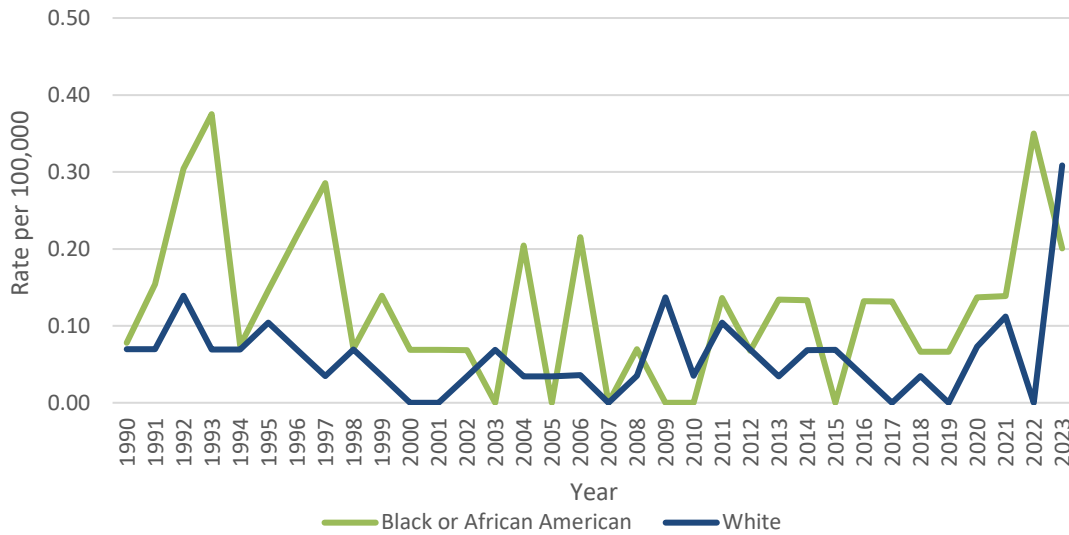
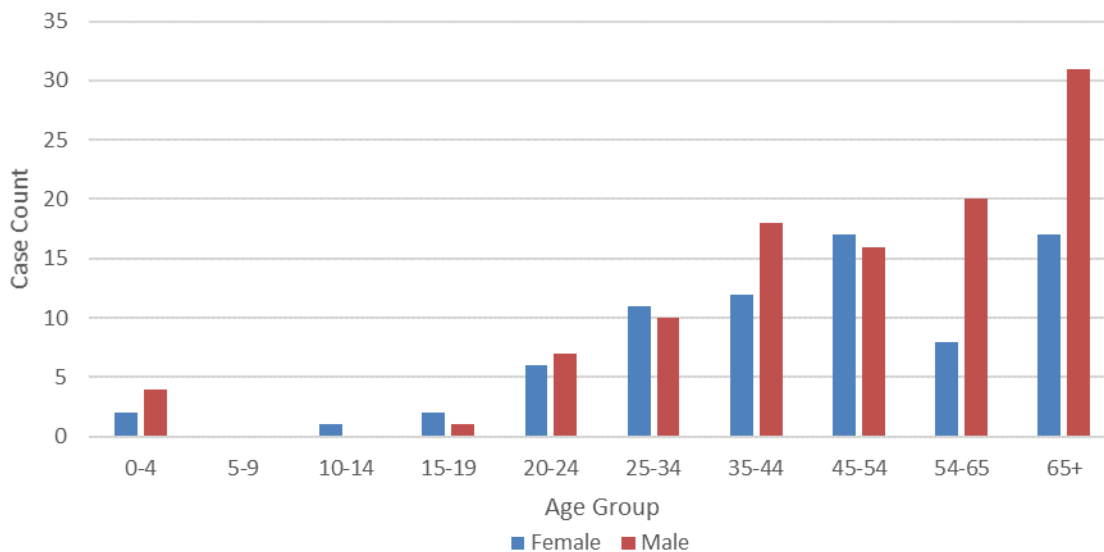


Figure 4: Blastomycosis Incidence Rate by Race – Louisiana 1990 – 2023**Figure 5: Blastomycosis Cases by Age and Sex – Louisiana 1990-2023**

Geographical Distribution

Historically, most cases have occurred in northern Louisiana. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, there was a significant cluster in Washington Parish, with elevated incidence also reported in neighboring St. Tammany and Tangipahoa Parishes, a trend that continues today. More recently, incidence patterns appear to be returning to historical norms, with northern parishes such as Red River, Catahoula, Richland, and Madison showing the highest rates of infection (Table).

Table: Blastomycosis 10 Year Incidence per 100,000 Population (2014-2023)

Parish	10 Year Incidence Rate	Parish	10 Year Incidence Rate
Acadia	0.00	Madison	0.94
Allen	0.00	Morehouse	0.00
Ascension	0.16	Natchitoches	0.00
Assumption	0.46	Orleans	0.05
Avoyelles	0.25	Ouachita	0.19
Beauregard	0.00	Plaquemines	0.00
Bienville	0.00	Pointe Coupee	0.00
Bossier	0.16	Rapides	0.00
Caddo	0.46	Red River	1.23
Calcasieu	0.05	Richland	0.99
Caldwell	0.00	Sabine	0.00
Cameron	0.00	Saint Bernard	0.00
Catahoula	1.07	Saint Charles	0.00
Claiborne	0.66	Saint Helena	0.00
Concordia	0.00	Saint James	0.00
De Soto	0.37	Saint Landry	0.12
East Baton	0.11	Saint Martin	0.38
East Carroll	0.00	Saint Mary	0.00
East Feliciana	0.00	Saint Tammany	0.23
Evangeline	0.30	St John the	0.00
Franklin	0.00	Tangipahoa	0.45
Grant	0.45	Tensas	0.00
Iberia	0.14	Terrebonne	0.18
Iberville	0.00	Union	0.46
Jackson	0.00	Vermilion	0.00
Jefferson	0.09	Vernon	0.41
Jefferson Davis	0.00	Washington	0.22
La Salle	0.04	Webster	0.53
Lafayette	0.10	West Baton	0.00
Lafourche	0.00	West Carroll	0.00
Lincoln	0.21	West Feliciana	0.65
Livingston	0.14	Winn	0.00

The Washington Parish Outbreak

When physicians in Washington parish began suspecting an unusually high incidence of the disease in their area, a special study was initiated and carried out from 1976 to 1985 to identify all cases of blastomycosis in this parish. The mean annual incidence rates for Louisiana and for Washington Parish were 0.23 and 6.8 cases per 100,000 population, respectively. That rate for Washington Parish is the highest annual incidence rate documented for a population in a non-outbreak setting in Louisiana.

Among the 30 cases detected in Washington Parish, the age range was three weeks to 81 years. Five cases died. There was no geographic clustering among cases; a case-control study failed to identify specific activities or host factors which may have predisposed them to infection.

The authors of the study concluded that Washington Parish was probably a hyperendemic area for blastomycosis because environmental conditions were especially conducive to *B. dermatitidis* growth. Most cases were sporadically infected. (Common-source exposures to *B. dermatitidis* with resultant clinical illness are rare even in hyperendemic settings.) Natural resistance to the organism seems to be a factor in preventing infection.

Seasonality

Blastomycosis infections occur throughout the year in Louisiana (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Seasonality for Blastomycosis - Louisiana, 1990-2023

