



**HIV/AIDS QUALITY OF  
CARE INITIATIVE  
(HAQOCI)**



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## WHAT IS CRYPTOCOCCAL MENINGITIS?

Cryptococcus is a fungus. It is very common in the soil. It can get into your body when you breathe in dust. It does not seem to spread from person to person.

Meningitis is the most common illness caused by Cryptococcus. Meningitis is an infection of the lining of the spinal cord and brain. It can cause coma and death. Cryptococcus can also infect the skin, lungs, or other parts of the body. The risk of cryptococcal infection is highest when your T-cell (CD4+) counts are below 100.

The first signs of meningitis include fever, fatigue, a stiff neck, headache, nausea and vomiting, confusion and vision problems. The symptoms may come on slowly.

HIV disease or medications can also cause these symptoms. Therefore, laboratory tests are used to confirm that you have meningitis.

The tests use spinal fluid. Doctors get the fluid by doing a spinal tap. A needle is inserted in the middle of your back just above your hips. The needle removes a sample of spinal fluid. The test is safe and usually not too painful. However, some people get headaches after a spinal tap that can last a few days.

## HOW IS MENINGITIS TREATED?

If you have meningitis, you will be treated with anti-fungal drugs such as amphotericin B, fluconazole, and flucytosine.

Amphotericin B is the strongest, but it can damage your kidneys. The other drugs have less serious side effects, but they are less effective at clearing out the cryptococcus.

If meningitis is diagnosed early enough, it can be treated without using amphotericin B. The usual treatment, however, is two weeks of amphotericin B followed by oral fluconazole. The fluconazole is continued for life. Without it, the meningitis is likely to come back.

## CAN MENINGITIS BE PREVENTED?

Taking fluconazole when your T-cell count is below 50 or once you have one attack, can help prevent cryptococcal meningitis.

Cryptococcal meningitis occurs most often in people with T-cell counts below 100. Although antifungal drugs can prevent cryptococcal meningitis, they are usually not used because of their high cost and the risk of developing drug-resistant yeast infections.

If you get meningitis, early diagnosis might allow treatment with less toxic drugs. Contact your physician if you have headaches, a stiff neck, vision problems, confusion, nausea, or vomiting.

If you develop meningitis, you will have to continue taking anti-fungal drugs to prevent the disease from coming back.

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