

Aspergillosis During Construction Activities Information Leaflet

General Information

The purpose of this leaflet is to inform patients, relatives, healthcare workers and those involved in the activities of construction of the risk of aspergillosis during construction work. This leaflet should be considered as introductory information only.

Aspergilli are tiny fungi that cannot be seen by the eye but commonly occur in soil, water and decaying vegetation. They can also live in old buildings or in areas such as ventilation shafts. Many types of *Aspergillus* are found in nature but only a few species cause human diseases.

Aspergillus may be released into the air during construction activities. *Aspergillus* can be transported great distances by normal conditions such as air currents and wind. Small pieces of dirt or dust in the air are the main ways that *Aspergillus* travels and causes infection in hospitals. Hospital activities that generate dust such as maintaining the ventilation system, cleaning, vacuuming and dry dusting can also allow *Aspergillus* to travel through the air.

Patients who are undergoing high dose chemotherapy for leukaemia and related illnesses or who are having bone marrow, stem cell or other transplants, or who are having other forms of therapy which may suppress their immune system

may be at risk of developing infection with this fungus in the lungs or other parts of the body. Healthy adults and children are not at increased risk of infection during construction work.

For the Patient

Should you be undergoing treatment in hospital which suppresses your immunity to infection you may become susceptible to developing infection with a fungus found in the environment called *Aspergillus*. Everyone breathes it into their airways and it normally does not do any harm. However, this fungus may cause illness if you become exposed to high numbers of *Aspergillus* in the air while your immunity is suppressed. This can be caused by an underlying blood cancer like leukaemia, by chemotherapy, or other immunosuppressive drugs e.g. drugs like corticosteroids, by stem cell or solid organ transplantation, or because of an underlying chronic lung condition. During building work every effort will be made to prevent the spread of *Aspergillus*. The medical team who are treating you will be in close communication with builders and the Microbiology/Infection Prevention and Control Team to make sure that the risk of spreading *Aspergillus* is kept to a minimum and will tell you if you need to take any special precautions.