



# Serious fungal infections in Canada

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1 **Title:** Serious fungal infections in Canada

2

3 **Authors:** Simon F. Dufresne<sup>1</sup>, Donald C. Cole<sup>2</sup>, David W. Denning<sup>3</sup> and Donald C.

4 Sheppard<sup>4</sup>

5

6 **Affiliation:**

7 1- Department of Infectious Diseases and Medical Microbiology, Maisonneuve-

8 Rosemont Hospital Research Center, Université de Montréal, Montréal, Canada;

9 2- Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada;

10 3- The National Aspergillosis Centre, University Hospital of South Manchester, The

11 University of Manchester, Manchester Academic Health Science Centre, Manchester,

12 UK;

13 4- Department of Microbiology and Immunology and Department of Medicine,

14 Infectious Diseases and Immunity in Global Health Program, Research Institute of the

15 McGill University Health Center, McGill University, Montréal, Canada.

16

17 **Corresponding author:**

18 Simon F. Dufresne

19 Department of Infectious Diseases and Medical Microbiology

20 Hôpital Maisonneuve-Rosemont

21 5415 boul. De l'Assomption

22 Montréal (Québec) Canada, H1T 1M4

23 [sf.dufresne@umontreal.ca](mailto:sf.dufresne@umontreal.ca)

24 Fax: 514-252-3898

25

1 **Abstract**

2 There are currently no nationwide epidemiological data on fungal infections in Canada. We  
3 estimated the burden of serious fungal diseases using literature review and modelling, as per a  
4 methodology previously described by the LIFE program ([www.LIFE-worldwide.org](http://www.LIFE-worldwide.org)). Among  
5 the population of Canada (35.5 million in 2014), it was estimated that approximately 1.8% are  
6 affected by a serious fungal infection. Recurrent vulvovaginal candidiasis, severe asthma with  
7 fungal sensitization and allergic broncho-pulmonary aspergillosis are the most frequent  
8 infections with a population prevalence of 498,688 (1,403/100,000), 73,344 (206/100,000)  
9 and 61,854 (174/100,000) cases, respectively. Over 3,000 invasive fungal infections are  
10 estimated to occur annually, with an incidence of 2,068 cases (5.8/100,000) of invasive  
11 candidiasis, 566 cases (1.6/100,000) of invasive aspergillosis, 252 cases (0.69/100,000) of  
12 *Pneumocystis* pneumonia, 99 cases (0.28/100,000) of endemic mycoses and 63 cases  
13 (0.18/100,000) of cryptococcosis. These estimates warrant validation through more formal  
14 epidemiological studies in Canada.

15

16 **Key words:** fungal diseases, burden, epidemiology, Canada

17

18

## 1 **Introduction**

2

3 Canada is a high-income country with a gross domestic product of 1,551 billion dollars (USD)  
4 in 2015 (GDP per capita, 43,249). Several studies have examined the epidemiology of fungal  
5 infections in Canada, but most were local (single-centered, regional or provincial) and focused  
6 on individual infections in specific populations. A single study reported on the burden of  
7 invasive fungal infections at the national level, however these data are over 20-years-old [1],  
8 and relied largely on clinical microbiology laboratory records review. Since that time, the  
9 Canadian population has expanded by 26%; use of immunosuppressive therapies that increase  
10 the risk of fungal infection have risen in importance, e.g. solid organ and stem cell  
11 transplantation and immunosuppressive biologic therapies; fungal diagnostics have improved;  
12 and medical care practices have evolved greatly. Hence, we sought to provide an estimate of  
13 the national burden of serious fungal infections.

14

## 15 **Material and methods**

16 The current study targeted serious fungal infections, which were defined as fungal-associated  
17 syndromes (infection or hypersensitivity) causing significant morbidity or mortality. The  
18 LIFE methodology ([www.life-worldwide.org](http://www.life-worldwide.org)) was followed as described previously [2,3],  
19 with some modifications.

20

21 In brief, an annual burden was estimated for each targeted serious fungal disease and  
22 presented as: i) absolute number of cases per year in Canada (representing either incident or  
23 prevalent cases depending on the nature of the infection), and ii) annual rates (incidence or  
24 prevalence), using the annual number of cases as the numerator and the entire Canadian  
25 population as the denominator. For simplicity, the 2014 Canadian population (n=35,540,419

1 [4]) was used regardless of the year from which the numerator data originated. To calculate  
2 the absolute number of cases per year in Canada, data derived from various sources were  
3 aggregated in a step-wise hierarchic fashion, starting with notifiable fungal diseases obtained  
4 directly from national and provincial public health agencies, followed by local data from  
5 individual centers or health authorities cited in peer review or grey literature and extrapolated  
6 to the total Canadian population (with the exception of geographically-confined infections,  
7 *Cryptococcus gattii* and endemic mycoses) and finally extrapolations from other countries'  
8 estimates.

9  
10 Sources included: Statistics Canada (total and adult female population [4], asthma prevalence  
11 [5]), the Canadian Cancer Society (acute leukemia [6] and overall cancer incidence [7]), the  
12 Canadian Institute for Health Information (number of solid organ transplants) [8], the  
13 Canadian Bone Marrow Transplantation Group (number of hematopoietic stem cell  
14 transplants), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (number of  
15 chronic obstructive pulmonary disease [COPD] admissions) [9], the Public Health Agency of  
16 Canada (HIV prevalence and AIDS incidence) [10], the World Health Organization  
17 (pulmonary tuberculosis incidence) [11] and Cystic Fibrosis Canada (cystic fibrosis  
18 prevalence) [12]. Of note, AIDS cases from the province of Québec are not currently reported  
19 to the Public Health Agency of Canada, so the number was calculated at pro rata of Québec  
20 population, assuming the same incidence as the rest of the country.

21  
22 A map showing the geographic distribution of endemic mycoses was created using  
23 SmartDraw (SmartDraw Software, LLC, San Diego, CA, USA).

24

## 25 **Results and Discussion**

1

2 Estimated annual numbers of cases of serious fungal diseases and the corresponding  
3 population rates are summarized in Table 1. The distribution of geographically-confined  
4 mycoses is shown in Figure 1.

5

#### 6 *Opportunistic invasive fungal infections*

7

8 The burden of invasive candidiasis (IC) was extrapolated from data reported from the Calgary  
9 health region and the Province of Québec [13,14]. In the first study, candidemia incidence was  
10 estimated at 2.8 cases per 100,000 person-year over a 5-year period, based on blood and  
11 cerebrospinal fluid culture (approximately 93% of cases were candidemia). Of note, incidence  
12 was significantly higher (3.7/100,000) during the latter 3 years of the study. In the second  
13 study, the reported annual incidence of candidemia was 3 cases per 100,000 population, with  
14 50% of cases arising from intensive care units. These rates translate to at least 1,034 cases of  
15 candidemia each year in Canada. Deep-seated *Candida* infections such as peritonitis and  
16 endophthalmitis are accompanied by positive blood cultures in at most 50% of cases [15].  
17 This observation is consistent with a recent nationwide German study which reported that the  
18 incidence of IC without candidemia was the same as candidemia [3]. Applying this ratio, a  
19 total of 2,068 IC cases are estimated to occur annually in Canada.

20

21 Invasive aspergillosis (IA) was largely reported in the main high-risk populations including  
22 patients with hematologic malignancies, hematopoietic stem cell transplant (HSCT) recipients  
23 and solid-organ transplant recipients (SOT), as well as patients with severe chronic  
24 obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). A recent study from a Montreal center found an  
25 incidence of 8.9% among adult acute leukemia patients (both myelogeneous [AML] and

1 lymphocytic [ALL]) [16], consistent with other international reports [17]. There were 1,215  
2 cases of AML in Canada in 2010 [6], corresponding to approximately 108 cases of IA that  
3 year. Since AML and ALL were reported to account for approximately 75% of IA cases  
4 occurring among patients with hematologic malignancies [18], an additional 36 IA cases are  
5 estimated to occur in patients with other hematologic malignancies. The incidence of IA  
6 amongst patients undergoing SOT was estimated using data from a prospective North  
7 American cohort study of these populations (12-month cumulative incidence: kidney, 0.2%;  
8 liver, 0.5%; lung, 3.8%; heart, 0.8%; pancreas, 0.2%) [19]. The incidence of IA after  
9 allogeneic HSCT was estimated at 7.5% based on recent observational and interventional  
10 studies [20-23]. In 2012, there were 1,358, 494, 194, 164 and 77 kidney, liver, lung, heart and  
11 pancreas transplants in Canada, respectively [8], corresponding to an estimated 14 cases of  
12 IA. A total of 1,200 allogeneic HSCT are performed annually in Canada (personal  
13 communication, Canadian Bone Marrow Transplantation Group), resulting in an additional  
14 estimated 90 cases of IA per year. Of note, large prospective cohort studies found that least  
15 20% of IA cases occur more than a year after SOT and HSCT [24,19], representing an  
16 additional 26 cases. In addition, data from the North American Path Alliance registry showed  
17 that 22.3% of IA cases were associated with other underlying diseases, including solid tumors,  
18 HIV/AIDS and autologous HSCT, which translates to 78 cases. Hence, 352 IA cases are  
19 estimated to occur annually amongst traditional immunocompromised populations. Finally,  
20 59,514 hospital admissions for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) [9] account for  
21 approximately 214 IA cases, or 3.6 cases per 1,000 admissions [25], resulting in a total of 566  
22 IA cases annually.

23

24 Over a 10-year period (2003-2012), 264 cases of *Pneumocystis pneumonia* (PCP) were  
25 diagnosed in single tertiary care centre in Montreal (personal communication, Dr M. Laskine,

1 Centre Hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal). Using this center's estimated catchment  
2 population of 3.4 million (41% of Quebec's population), one might expect as many as 252  
3 cases per year across Canada.

4  
5 A *C. gattii* outbreak has been ongoing in the province of British Columbia since 1999 [26]  
6 (Figure 1). Between 2010 and 2013, a mean of 23 *C. gattii* infections per year were reported  
7 to the British Columbia CDC [27]. During a 2-year period (1992-1994) prior to the *C. gattii*  
8 outbreak, investigators had identified 81 cases of *C. neoformans* disease across the country  
9 [1]. Assuming that *C. gattii* infections represent an increased burden of disease and that *C.*  
10 *neoformans* infection rates remain unchanged, then at least 63 cryptococcal infections are  
11 estimated to occur annually.

### 12 13 *Endemic mycoses*

14  
15 Blastomycosis is endemic in the provinces of Ontario, Québec and Manitoba (Figure 1). It is  
16 considered hyperendemic in an area of northwestern Ontario [28]. In the former two  
17 provinces, recently published reports suggest that a mean of 44 culture-proven cases occur  
18 annually, [29,30]. In Manitoba where blastomycosis is a reportable infection, 19 cases were  
19 documented in 2013 [31]. Collectively, these data suggest an annual incidence of at least 63  
20 cases of blastomycosis in these three provinces, hence in Canada.

21  
22 Histoplasmosis occurs mainly along the Saint-Lawrence river valley, in Ontario and Québec  
23 (Figure 1). Histoplasmin reactivity studies have shown a prevalence of 9-27% in southern  
24 Québec [32-34]. The incidence of active histoplasmosis has been estimated at 27 cases per  
25 year in Canada in a study spanning the 2-year period 1992-1994 [1].



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*Coccidioides immitis/posadasii* is not indigenous in Canada, though cases of active coccidioidomycosis are imported. Studies have estimated there are between 2 and 9 cases of coccidioidomycosis annually, largely in returning travelers [35,1].

*Non-invasive pulmonary aspergillosis*

Extrapolating from pulmonary tuberculosis 2014 annual incidence data (n=1,065) [11], the prevalence of cases of CPA following tuberculosis were estimated at 148 cases using a previously reported model [36]. If prior pulmonary tuberculosis is the predisposing factor in approximately 30% of cases of CPA [37], an estimated 492 new cases of CPA are expected.

ABPA burden was derived from the number of Canadian adults with asthma (n=2,444,804) [5] and the number of patients suffering from cystic fibrosis (CF; n=4,077) [12]. The proportion of ABPA among asthma patients was estimated at 2.5% [38] and 18% in those with CF [39], leading to a calculated national prevalence of 61,854 cases of ABPA. SAFS burden was derived from asthma prevalence and estimated at 73,344 cases, assuming a severe asthma prevalence of 10% of all cases of asthma and an *Aspergillus* sensitization prevalence of 30% [40].

*Mucosal candidiasis*

RVVC is reported to affect up to 9% of women of reproductive age [41]. Canadian prevalence of RVVC was calculated by applying 6% to the Canadian adult women's population (between 15 and 50 years old; n=8,311,477 [4]), yielding an estimated 498,688 cases present.

1

2 In a systematic review, the prevalence of OC in cancer patients was estimated 7.5%, 39.1%  
3 and 32.6%, before, during and after the end of treatment, respectively [42]. In Canada,  
4 196,900 new cases of cancer were estimated in 2015 [7]. Because the total number of patients  
5 undergoing treatment and the survival rates are not known, only pre-treatment OC was  
6 considered and the estimated prevalence was calculated at 14,767 cases of OC nationally.  
7 HIV infection is responsible for an additional 752 cases, including approximately 1% of HIV-  
8 positive patients without AIDS and 18% of those with AIDS [43], based on a prevalence of  
9 71,300 HIV-positive patients in 2013 in Canada including 218 with AIDS [10].

10

11 EC is an AIDS-defining illness affecting nearly 20% of patients AIDS [44], thus at least 43  
12 cases of EC are expected to occur annually in Canada. EC is also associated with other  
13 underlying conditions (eg. receipt of corticosteroids), but data on infection rates in these  
14 populations are not sufficient to inform accurate estimates.

15

16 Our study found that approximately 3,000 invasive fungal infections occur annually in  
17 Canada, while over half a million people suffer from a chronic *Candida* or *Aspergillus*  
18 infection. Overall, RVVC is likely the most frequent serious fungal disease in Canada, with  
19 substantial quality of life impairment [45] and health costs [46], prompting the need for  
20 specific guidelines addressing diagnostic and treatment. Education on current guidelines for  
21 non-invasive forms of pulmonary aspergillosis is needed to increase awareness, diagnosis and  
22 treatment proficiency among health care providers. Invasive fungal infections annual  
23 incidence (8.3/100,000) is similar to that of invasive pneumococcal disease (8.9 in 2014) and  
24 higher than invasive *S. pyogenes* disease (4.7 in 2013), infectious syphilis (5.1 in 2011),  
25 tuberculosis (4.4 in 2014) and HIV (5.9 in 2013) all regarded as important in Canada [47].

1 Amongst invasive infections, candidiasis is by far the most common disease, followed by  
2 aspergillosis. Cryptococcosis, pneumocystosis and endemic mycoses are less commonly  
3 encountered, consistent with findings of a recent large registry across North America [48].  
4 Invasive fungal infections data from two Canadian centers have confirmed 90-day fatality  
5 rates of 41% and 36% for IC and IA, respectively [49], over a thousand deaths annually in  
6 Canada.

7  
8 Our estimates of serious fungal infection burden in Canada provide an opportunity for both  
9 health care providers and public health agencies to improve diagnostics, surveillance and  
10 formal epidemiological studies, including measures of health care utilization.

11

1 **Tables & Figures**

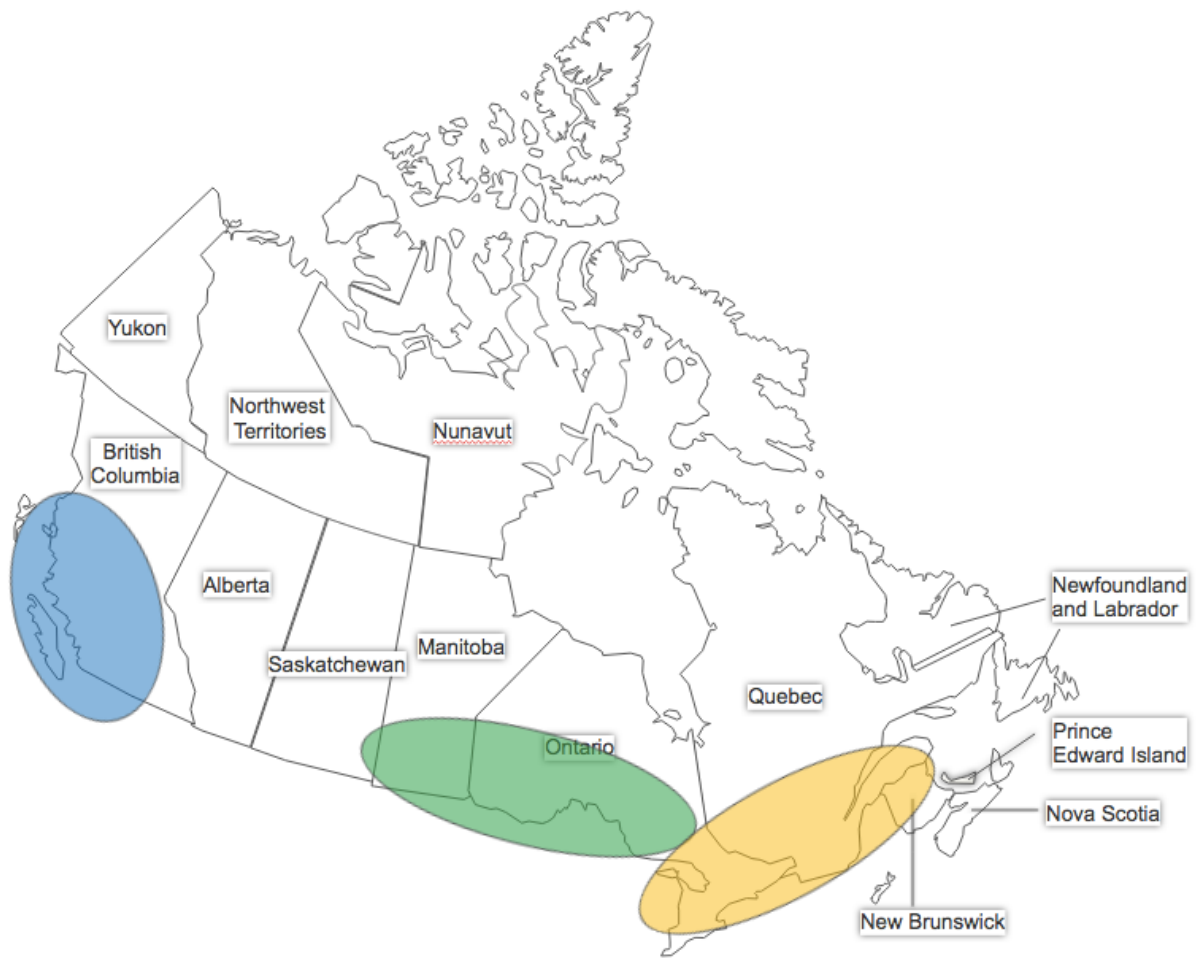
2 Table 1. Estimated annual burden of serious fungal diseases in Canada.

Serious fungal infection categories and types	Proportion affected (per 100,000 population)	# cases
Opportunistic invasive fungal infections	8,28	2,949
Invasive candidiasis (IC) without candidemia	2,91	1,034
Candidemia	2,91	1,034
Invasive aspergillosis (IA)	1,59	566
<i>Pneumocystis pneumonia</i> (PCP)	0,69	252
Cryptococcosis	0,18	63
Endemic mycoses	0,28	99
Blastomycosis	0,18	63
Histoplasmosis	0,08	27
Coccidioidomycosis	0,03	9
Non-invasive pulmonary aspergillosis	381,79	135,690
Severe asthma with fungal sensitization (SAFS)	206,37	73,344
Allergic bronchopulmonary aspergillosis (ABPA)	174,04	61,854
Chronic pulmonary aspergillosis (CPA)	1,38	492
Mucosal candidiasis	1,446,94	514,250
Recurrent vulvovaginal candidiasis (RVVC)	1,403,16	498,688
Oropharyngeal candidiasis (OC)	43,67	15,519
Esophageal candidiasis (EC)	0,12	43

3

4

1 **Figure 1.** Localization of geographically-confined mycoses in Canada. Colored areas  
2 represent the approximate geographic distribution of three fungal infections: Blue: *C. gattii*;  
3 Green: blastomycosis; Yellow: blastomycosis and histoplasmosis.  
4



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