

Rare fungus migrates from Canada

by UPI

PORTLAND - Health experts say a rare fungal disease that can be fatal to people has migrated from the Canadian woods to forests in Oregon and Washington.

Cryptococcus gattii has killed 19 people in Canada since 1999 and a total of five people in Oregon and Washington since 2004, The Oregonian reported Saturday.

The fungus lives in soil, water and trees, such as the Douglas fir, and likely spread down Interstate 5 from British Columbia on logging trucks, car tires and people's shoes, said Edmond Byrnes, a scientist at Duke University Medical Center.

"It's likely going to spread down the coast into California," Byrnes said, noting it also could find its way to Idaho, Montana and Wyoming.

Few people exposed to the fungus will get sick because the body's natural defenses, in most cases, defeats the pathogen, said Dr. Paul Cieslak, of Oregon's Public Health Division, adding no one should avoid camping or walking in the woods.

"It's so rare that it's frankly not worth thinking about in that way," Cieslak said.

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