

There's a fungus among us

DEAR DR. DONOHUE: After coughing up blood, I saw a specialist who did a bronchoscopy to find out what was wrong. An abscess was seen, and I was put on antibiotics for six weeks. They did no good.

I then had a biopsy, which showed the fungus *Aspergillus*. I was then put on Sporanox.

A month and a half later, a scan showed the fungus had diminished. Three months later a repeat scan showed no change in size.

Will this condition be conquered eventually? Is there anything else that can be done?

I've been told the fungus lives in soil. Should I stop gardening?—B.S.



Dr. Paul Donohue

ANSWER: *Aspergillus* is all around us. Soil is but one of its breeding grounds. You do not have to give up gardening.

Every person on earth encounters *Aspergillus*. Few become ill as result of that encounter. You were one of the unlucky few.

You're going to meet *Aspergillus* in many other places,

but it's not likely you will have a second illness resulting from that rendezvous.

Aspergillus on rare occasions is a trouble maker. For some, it causes an allergic asthma attack—which often happens to farmers who enter a barn filled with stored hay. The fungus grows rapidly on such vegetation.

People who have an allergic reaction need to avoid

exposure to *Aspergillus*.

You did not have an allergic reaction. You have a so-called fungus ball, a matted mass of fungus. Lung fungus balls can cause bleeding. A little blood in the sputum is not of grave concern. However, the fungus can erode large blood vessels and cause massive bleeding.

The fungus ball is shrinking, slow as that process is. One option, therefore, is to continue Sporanox, an excellent anti-fungal medicine.

If the fungus ball is in an area amenable to surgery, then surgical removal almost always results in a cure.