

### **SPOROTRICHOSIS, A SKIN DISEASE CAUSED BY THE FUNGUS *Sporotrichum schenckii***

Dr. Michael W. Rytel of the Medical College of Wisconsin (Department of Medicine, Division of Infectious Diseases, 8700 West Wisconsin Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53226) has been granted an American Florists Endowment grant of \$15,000 and the HRI Endowment Fund's 1987 Dodson Insurance Group Research Grant of \$1,500 for research to develop a reliable, accurate diagnostic procedure for sporotrichosis.

The sporotrichosis disease, according to Rytel, results from "a little-recognized and hard to identify fungal infection. Infection of the skin may occur through cuts, abrasions or puncture wounds, most commonly on the hands and arms. In 1-4 weeks, small, painless, skin blisters may erupt; the blisters may enlarge and become inflamed. Other areas of the body may become infected as the fungus spreads through the lymph vessels. Lymph glands in the armpit or elbow may become enlarged and sore. If untreated, the disease can progress slowly to the bones and abdominal organs. Because many doctors are unfamiliar with the disease, delayed diagnosis may be a problem. **The disease is rarely fatal.**

The usual treatment for sporotrichosis is a "saturated solution of potassium iodide" (SSKI) taken by mouth. Treatment should be continued until all evidence of infection has disappeared, which may take several months. For an infection which is more general or advanced, the drug Amphotericin-B can be administered intravenously.

The fungus, *Sporothrix schenckii*, is usually transmitted via sphagnum moss used to keep plant roots moist during shipment and storage. The fungus seems to increase in the moistness of most packing sheds. But, it also may be found in nursery soil, flowers, shrubs and lumber.

The *Sporothrix schenckii* fungus has been found throughout the country, but is most prevalent in the midwestern states, particularly Wisconsin: **Outbreaks elsewhere have resulted from moss originating in Wisconsin.**

To avoid sporotrichosis: Sphagnum moss should be stored under dry conditions. Areas where peat moss is used should be disinfected regularly. Workers should wear protective clothing, especially rubber gloves and long-sleeved shirts. Good personal hygiene is essential - hands and arms should be thoroughly washed with soap and water after any exposure. Lacerations and abrasions must receive special attention and prompt treatment. If sores do not heal properly,

infected individuals should seek immediate medical attention and ask their doctors about the possibility of having contracted sporotrichosis.

Information Sources:

Crop Protection Newsletter, Alberta Agriculture 2(5), May 1987.

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