

VALLEY FEVER (COCCIDIOIDOMYCOSIS)

What is Valley Fever?

Valley Fever is an illness that usually affects the lungs. It is caused by a fungus called *Coccidioides*. *Coccidioides* lives in the dirt. A hardy form of the fungus can live for a long time under harsh environmental conditions such as heat, cold, and drought, and is spread through spores in the air when the dirt is disturbed. An estimated 150,000 *Coccidioides* infections occur each year in the United States, although more than half of these infections do not produce symptoms.

Where is the Valley Fever fungus found?

Valley Fever fungus is found in some areas of the southwestern United States, and in parts of Mexico and Central and South America. These areas have dirt and weather conditions that allow the fungus to grow. In California, the fungus is found in many areas of the San Joaquin Valley (Central Valley).

How do people get Valley Fever?

People can get Valley Fever if they breathe in the dust from the dirt that contains fungal spores. Fungal spores can get into the air when dirt containing the fungus is disturbed by digging, during construction, or under strong winds. Construction and farm workers, military personnel, archaeologists, and others who breathe in dust from the dirt in the areas where Valley Fever is common may be exposed to the fungal spores.

What are the signs and symptoms of Valley Fever?

About 60 percent of infected people have no symptoms at all. Most people who have symptoms develop a flu-like illness with cough, fever, chest pain, headache, muscle aches, and tiredness that can last a month. Sometimes other parts of the body are affected, such as the brain, bone, skin, or other organs. This is called disseminated Valley Fever. Less than one percent of infected persons develop disseminated Valley Fever.

How is Valley Fever diagnosed?

When Valley Fever is suspected, the doctor can order an antibody blood test or culture.

How is Valley Fever treated?

Although many persons with Valley Fever require no treatment, all persons with symptoms should seek medical attention. Your doctor will decide if you need treatment, which is usually with an oral or injected anti-fungal medicine.

Can I get Valley Fever from a person who is infected? No. Valley Fever is not transmitted from one person to another.

Who are at risk for getting disseminated Valley Fever?

Some groups of people are at increased risk for disseminated disease and can become seriously ill when infected. People at risk for severe disease include those with weakened immune systems such as persons with cancer, who are on cancer chemotherapy, or persons who are HIV-infected. Also at risk for serious illness are the elderly, persons of African, or Filipino descent, and women in the third trimester of pregnancy.

Can Valley Fever be prevented?

Valley Fever is difficult to prevent. There is currently no vaccine; efforts to develop a vaccine are ongoing. Persons at risk for Valley Fever or for getting severe illness from Valley Fever should avoid exposure to dusty air in areas where Valley Fever is common. Those exposed to dust during their jobs or outside activities in these areas should consider respiratory protection, such as a mask, during such activities.

Where can I get more information on Valley Fever?

The California Department of Public Health and the Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have websites with information on Valley Fever:

<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/Coccidioidomycosis.aspx>

<http://www.cdc.gov/fungal/coccidioidomycosis/>