

VALLEY FEVER (COCCIDIOIDOMYCOSIS)

Fact Sheet for Persons with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)

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 persons with HIV get Valley Fever?

Persons with HIV become infected with Valley Fever in the same way as all other people, by breathing in the fungal spores. 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.

Are persons with HIV more likely to get infected with Valley Fever?

No. Persons who are HIV-infected are not more likely to be infected with the fungus that causes Valley Fever. However, some persons with HIV who were infected with Valley Fever in the past may become ill if their immune system weakens and an old infection, which had been lying dormant in the body, becomes reactivated.

How do persons with HIV know if they have Valley Fever?

Most people who have symptoms develop a flu-like illness with cough, fever, chest pain, headache, muscle aches, and tiredness. Sometimes other parts of the body are affected, such as the brain, bone, skin or other organs.

What should persons with HIV do if they think they have Valley Fever?

If you have symptoms of Valley Fever, seek medical attention right away. Be sure to tell your doctor if you have ever lived in or traveled to an area where Valley Fever is common.

How is Valley Fever treated in persons with HIV?

There are a variety of oral and injectable anti-fungal medications for the treatment of Valley Fever. Your doctor will decide the best treatment for you and determine how long you need to be on treatment. Some persons with Valley Fever need to be on lifelong treatment to prevent the illness from recurring.

Do persons with HIV react differently to Valley Fever than other people?

Any person with a weakened immune system is at risk for serious illness with Valley Fever. Persons with HIV are at risk for disseminated Valley Fever which spreads outside of the lungs to the brain, bone, skin, or to other organs.

Can a person with HIV get Valley Fever from another person who is infected?

No. Valley Fever is not transmitted from one person to another.

How can people with HIV protect themselves against getting Valley Fever?

A strong immune system is the best protection against serious illness with Valley Fever. A person with HIV can help to protect themselves by being under a doctor's care and taking all their prescribed HIV medications.

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 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/>