

Valley Fever Fact Sheet

What is Valley fever?

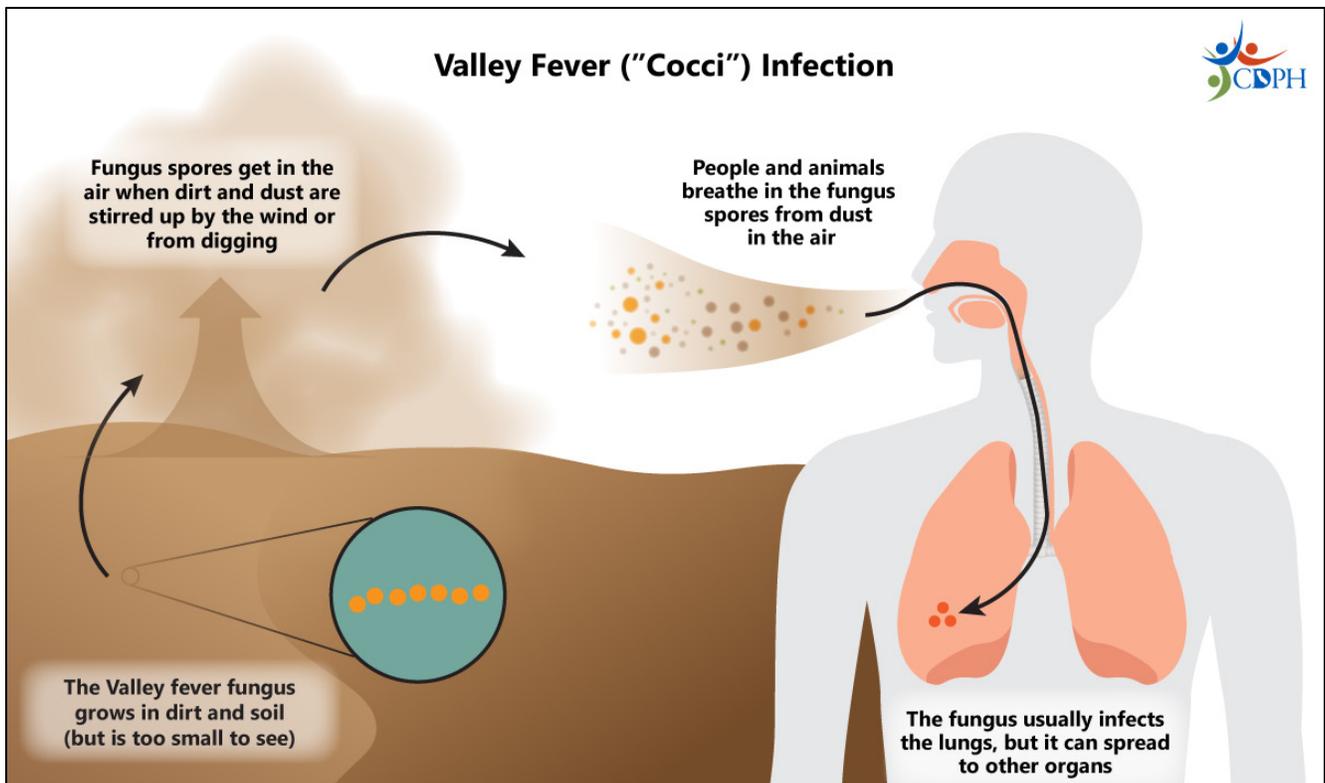
Valley fever (also called coccidioidomycosis or “cocci”) is an infectious disease caused by the *Coccidioides* fungus that lives in the soil and dirt in certain areas of California and the southwestern United States. If you breathe in this fungus from dust in the air, it can infect your lungs and cause symptoms such as cough, fever, chest pain, or tiredness. Some people with Valley fever may develop severe disease, which may require hospitalization. In rare cases, the infection can spread beyond the lungs to other parts of the body (this is called disseminated Valley fever).

In California, the number of reported Valley fever cases has greatly increased in recent years. Since 2000, the number of cases has increased from less than 1,000 cases to more than 9,000 cases in 2019.

How do people get Valley fever?

People can get Valley fever by breathing in dust that contains spores of the *Coccidioides* fungus. Like seeds from plants, a fungus grows and spreads from tiny spores that are too small to see. When soil or dirt are stirred up by strong winds or while digging, dust containing these fungal spores can get into the air. Anyone who lives, works, or visits in an area where the Valley fever fungus grows can breathe in these fungal spores without knowing it and become infected.

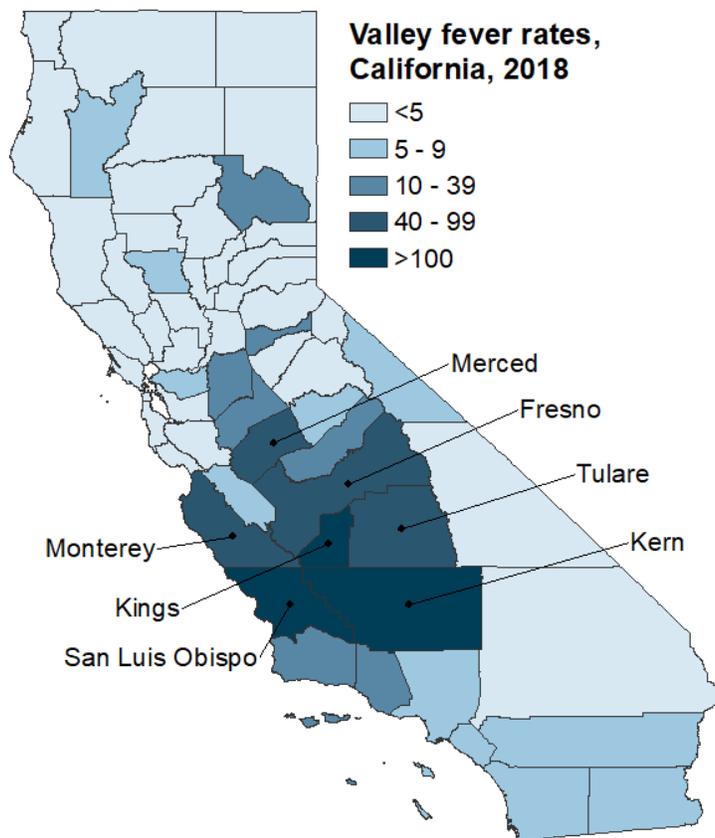
Animals, including pets, can also become infected by breathing in fungal spores. Valley fever is not contagious and cannot spread from one person or animal to another.



When and where do people get Valley fever?

People can get Valley fever any time of the year, but more people are likely to be infected with the fungus that causes Valley fever in the late summer and fall than at other times of the year.

People are more likely to get Valley fever if they live, work, or visit in areas where the fungus grows in the soil or is in dust in the air. There is no test available to see if the Valley fever fungus is growing in the soil in certain areas, but we do know that Valley fever has been diagnosed in people living in counties throughout California. Most cases of Valley fever in California (over 65%) are reported in people who live in the Central Valley and Central Coast regions. The map below shows the rates of reported Valley fever cases by county in California, with darker shaded counties having higher rates than lighter shaded counties.



Rates of reported Valley fever cases per 100,000 population. Darkest colored counties had the highest rates of Valley fever.

Outside of California, Valley fever occurs in Arizona, and some areas of Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Texas, and parts of Mexico and Central and South America.

What are the signs and symptoms of Valley fever?

Most people (about 6 in 10) infected with Valley fever have no symptoms, and their bodies will fight off the infection naturally. People who do get sick usually develop symptoms 1–3 weeks after breathing in the fungus.

Valley fever usually infects the lungs, and some people can develop respiratory symptoms or pneumonia (a lung infection). People who get sick may have some of the following symptoms:

- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Cough
- Chest pain
- Fever
- Rash on upper body or legs
- Headaches
- Muscle or joint aches
- Night sweats
- Unexplained weight loss

Some of these symptoms are similar to those of other common illnesses (including COVID-19 and the flu), but Valley fever symptoms can last a month or more.

Most people fully recover from Valley fever. In rare cases, Valley fever can spread to other parts of the body and infect the brain, joints, bone, skin, or other organs. This form of Valley fever can be very serious and fatal.

How is Valley fever diagnosed and treated?

If you have Valley fever symptoms that last more than a week, talk to a healthcare provider. Since Valley fever symptoms are similar to those of other common illnesses, your provider may order a blood test or other tests (such as a chest x-ray) to help diagnose Valley fever.

Treatment may not be needed for mild infections, which can sometimes get better on their own. However, all people with symptoms should see a healthcare provider who can determine if treatment is needed. There are no over-the-counter medications to treat Valley fever.

If you are diagnosed with Valley fever, it is very important to follow the instructions given by your healthcare provider about treatment, follow-up testing, and appointments.

If a person has had Valley fever before, can they get it again?

If a person has already had Valley fever, their immune system will most likely protect them from getting it again. Although it is rare, some people who have already had Valley fever could get sick again if their immune system weakens because of certain medical conditions (such as cancer) or by taking certain medications, like those for cancer, organ transplant, or autoimmune disease.

Are certain people at greater risk for Valley fever?

Anyone can get Valley fever, including healthy adults and children. Certain groups may be at higher risk of getting Valley fever, and other groups may be at higher risk of having severe or disseminated disease if infected.

People at higher risk of getting Valley fever:

People who live, work, or travel in areas with high rates of Valley fever (see map above) may be at higher risk of getting infected than others, especially if they:

- Participate in outdoor activities that involve close contact to dirt or dust, including yard work, gardening, and digging
- Live or work near areas where dirt and soil are stirred up, such as construction or excavation sites
- Work in jobs where dirt and soil are stirred up or disturbed, including construction, farming, military work, and archaeology
 - If you work in a job where dirt or soil is disturbed in a place where Valley fever is common, you and your employer may want to review the [CDPH website for preventing work-related Valley fever](#).

More cases of Valley fever have been reported among men than among women, and among adults than among children. Work and outdoor exposure among adult men may explain the higher rates of Valley fever in this group.

People at higher risk of having severe or disseminated Valley fever if infected:

- Older adults (60+ years old)
- People who are Black or Filipino
- Pregnant women, especially in the later stages of pregnancy
- People with diabetes
- People with health conditions that weaken their immune system such as:
 - Cancer
 - Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection
 - Treatment with chemotherapy, steroids, or other medications that affect the immune system
 - Organ transplant

How can I help reduce my risk of getting Valley fever?

It is very difficult to avoid breathing in the Valley fever fungus in areas where it is common in the environment. People who live, work, or travel in these areas can try to avoid spending time in dusty areas as much as possible to reduce the risk of breathing in the Valley fever fungus from dust in the air. There is no vaccine to prevent Valley fever.

Some practical tips may help reduce the risk of getting Valley fever. It is important to know that these steps have not been proven to prevent Valley fever.

Avoid dust in places where Valley fever is common (where Valley fever rates are high):

- Stay inside and keep windows and doors closed when it is windy outside and the air is dusty, especially during dust storms.
- Consider avoiding outdoor activities that involve close contact to dirt or dust, including yard work, gardening, and digging, especially if you are in one of the groups at higher risk for severe or disseminated Valley fever.
- Cover open dirt areas around your home with grass, plants, or other ground cover to help reduce dusty, open areas.
- While driving in these areas, keep car windows closed and use recirculating air, if available.
- Try to avoid dusty areas, like construction or excavation sites.
- If you cannot avoid these areas, or if you must be outdoors in dusty air, consider wearing an N95 respirator (a type of face mask) to help protect against breathing in dust that can cause Valley fever.
 - N95 respirators are available at drugstores and hardware supply stores.
 - To be effective, N95 masks must be fitted properly. Instructions can be found on several websites, including the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention instruction video for using disposable respirators](#).

When digging in dirt or stirring up dust in areas where Valley fever is common:

- Stay upwind of the area where dirt is being disturbed.
- Wet down soil before digging or disturbing dirt to reduce dust.
- Consider wearing an N95 respirator (mask).
- After returning indoors, change out of clothes if covered with dirt.
 - Be careful not to shake out clothing and breathe in the dust before washing. If someone else is washing your clothes, warn the person before they handle the clothes.

What is being done about Valley fever in California?

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and local health departments track cases of Valley fever and monitor the number of people who get sick with Valley fever in California.

CDPH also reviews data and investigates outbreaks of Valley fever to better understand:

- Where Valley fever is most common
- Who is most affected by Valley fever
- If disease trends of Valley fever are changing
- How people can reduce their risk of getting Valley fever

CDPH also works to raise awareness of Valley fever among healthcare providers and the public and provides information to employers to help prevent Valley fever in the workplace.

Where can I get more information about Valley fever?

Contact your local health department or visit [CDPH's Valley fever website](#) for more information about Valley fever. You can also visit the [CDC's Valley fever website](#).

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