

VALLEY FEVER FACTS FOR EMPLOYERS

VALLEY FEVER COULD BE WHERE YOU WORK. PROTECT YOUR WORKFORCE!

Valley fever is an illness caused by a fungus found in the soil in many parts of California, especially the Central Valley and Central Coast. For some, it can be serious and even fatal. Construction workers and others who work outdoors are especially at risk if they dig or disturb soil, operate heavy machinery, or work under windy conditions.

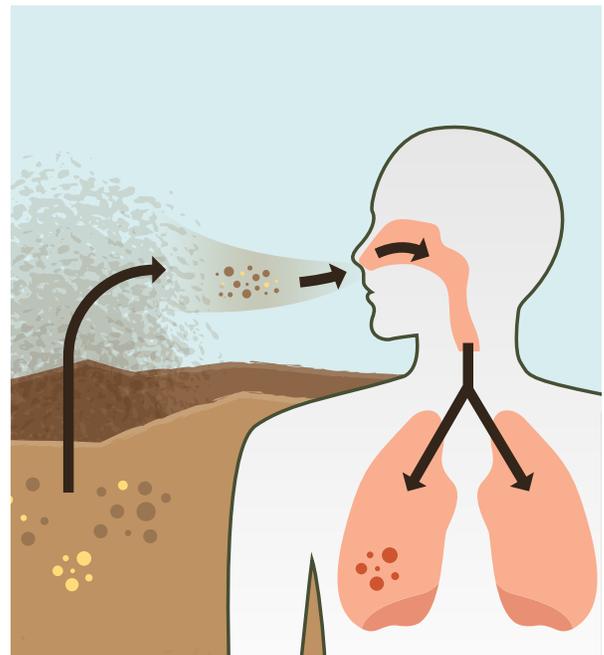


Valley fever is bad news! It can cause weeks or months of missed work. Some people get sick enough to need lifelong treatment.

HOW DO YOU GET VALLEY FEVER?

People can get Valley fever by breathing in dust air that contains spores of the *Coccidioides* fungus that grows in the soil. The tiny spores are too small to see. When soil containing this fungus is disturbed by activities such as digging, moving vehicles, or by the wind, the spores get into the air and can be inhaled.

Valley fever cannot be spread from one person to another.



For more information on what you and your employees can do to prevent Valley fever on the job, visit us online.

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WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF VALLEY FEVER AND HOW CAN IT BE TREATED?

Valley fever can affect people in different ways. Common symptoms can be mistaken for a cold, influenza, or pneumonia but last longer than one week. Although many people with Valley fever do not require treatment, those with symptoms that last longer than one week should seek medical attention.

Valley fever can be diagnosed with a blood test or other laboratory test. Although medications called “antifungals” are available to treat infections like Valley fever, not everyone needs this kind of treatment. If any employees think they may have work-related Valley fever, you should send them for a medical evaluation.

Common Symptoms Include:



FATIGUE



COUGH



TROUBLE
BREATHING



FEVER



NIGHT
SWEATS



MUSCLE OR
JOINT PAIN



CHEST
PAIN



WEIGHT
LOSS



RASH



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HOW CAN I PROTECT MY EMPLOYEES AND KEEP THEM SAFE ON THE JOB?

A 2019 California law (AB 203) requires construction employers to provide Valley fever training to workers if a job in one of the high Valley fever counties will disturb soil.

Learn more at www.cdph.ca.gov/WorkRelatedValleyFever

WORK SMART ON-SITE:

Employers can reduce workers' risk by incorporating the following into the company's project-specific Injury and Illness Prevention Program.

- 1. Determine if the worksite is in an area where Valley fever has been found.** The following counties have been known to have the highest rates of Valley fever among residents: Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, Monterey, San Joaquin, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Tulare, and Ventura. Check with your local health department to determine if cases have been known to occur near your work area.
- 2. Train workers and staff to recognize symptoms and minimize exposure.** Encourage workers to report symptoms that last more than a week to a crew leader, foreman, or supervisor. Give them the worker fact sheet and send them for a medical evaluation.
- 3. Limit workers' exposure to outdoor dust in areas where Valley fever is common.** For example, minimize the amount of soil that is disturbed and suspend work during heavy wind or dust storms.
- 4. Keep the soil wet before, during, and after disturbing it.** When soil will be disturbed by heavy equipment or vehicles, wet the soil before disturbing it. Wet it continuously while digging to keep dust levels down.
- 5. Provide safer heavy equipment.** Choose vehicles with enclosed, air-conditioned cabs equipped with high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters.
- 6. Work upwind.** When digging a trench or performing other soil-disturbing tasks, position workers upwind if possible.
- 7. Use respiratory protection.** When exposure to dust is unavoidable, provide NIOSH-approved respirators with particulate filters rated as N95, N99, N100, P100, or HEPA. Implement a full respirator program that meets Cal/OSHA requirements.

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MINIMIZE THE RISK OF SPREADING SPORES:

Another way to protect your employees — and their families — from Valley fever is to prevent the transport of spores from your worksites to other places. Soil, dirt, and dust that contain the fungus can be carried by equipment, clothing, and people. Incorporate these actions into your daily work routine:

- 1. Wash off dirt before leaving the worksite.** Clean tools, equipment, and vehicles with water to remove soil before transporting off-site.
- 2. Give your workers protective clothing.** Provide workers with coveralls or disposable Tyvek® daily. Be aware that protective clothing can increase the risk of heat illness. At the end of the workday, require workers to remove their work clothes at the worksite.
- 3. Separate “on-the-job” and “off-the-job” clothes and shoes.** Keep street clothes and work clothes separate by providing separate lockers or other storage areas. If possible, store work boots at the worksite.
- 4. Hit the showers.** Encourage workers to shower and wash their hair at the end of the shift or as soon as they get home.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF ONE OF MY WORKERS REPORTS VALLEY FEVER SYMPTOMS?

Early detection and medical attention are important when it comes to Valley fever. It can prevent employees from missing work or developing long-term disabilities.

If one of your employees reports symptoms:

- 1.** Send the worker to the company’s workers’ compensation health care provider or occupational medicine clinic. Choose a provider who is knowledgeable about work-related Valley fever.
- 2.** Provide the health care provider with details about the location of the worksite and dust or soil exposure.
- 3.** Employers must immediately report cases where workers are hospitalized to Cal/OSHA within 24 hours.

Occupational Health Branch, California Department of Public Health. June 2020.

To obtain a copy of this document in an alternative format, please contact (510) 620-5757 (CA Relay Service: 711). Please allow at least 10 working days to coordinate alternative format services.

Visit www.cdph.ca.gov/WorkRelatedValleyFever for more information.