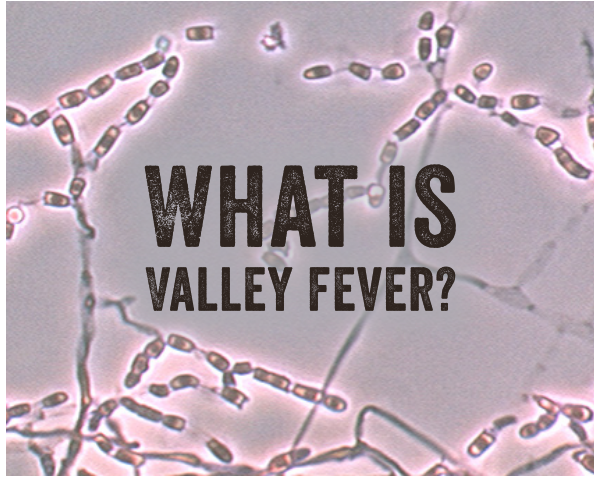


VALLEY FEVER TALKING POINTS



- Valley fever (also called coccidioidomycosis or “cocci”) is an infectious disease caused by the *Coccidioides* fungus that grows in the soil and dirt in some areas of California and the southwestern United States. The fungus can infect the lungs and cause respiratory symptoms. In most people, symptoms often get better on their own.
- Some people with Valley fever may develop severe disease. When Valley fever is severe, patients may need to be hospitalized, and in rare cases, the infection can spread beyond the lungs to other organs (this is called disseminated Valley fever). This type of infection is rare, but it can be very serious and sometimes fatal.

- In California, the number of reported Valley fever cases has increased greatly 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.
- Since Valley fever is common in certain parts of California and can cause serious disease, it is important that people are aware of Valley fever and know when to talk to a healthcare provider if they think symptoms could be Valley fever.

HOW DO PEOPLE GET VALLEY FEVER?

- People can get Valley fever by breathing in dust from outdoor air that contains the Valley fever fungus.
- The fungus spores that cause Valley fever can be present in outdoor dust that gets airborne when it is windy outside or when soil is disturbed while digging.
- Anyone who lives, works, or travels in an area where Valley fever has been reported can become infected. Animals, including pets, can also become infected.
- 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. However, more people get infected with Valley fever in the late summer and fall than at other times of the year.
- Most cases of Valley fever (over 65%) are reported in people who live in the San Joaquin (Central) Valley and Central Coast regions. People are more likely to get Valley fever if they live, work, or travel in these areas, but Valley fever has been diagnosed in people living throughout California.

VALLEY FEVER TALKING POINTS

WHAT ARE POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS FOR THE INCREASE IN VALLEY FEVER CASES IN CALIFORNIA?

It is difficult to identify the specific factors that have caused a recent increase in Valley fever cases. Valley fever cases might have increased in California because of a number of different factors:

- Winter rains after several years of drought in California
- Other climatic and environmental factors
- Soil disturbance activities (including construction) in areas where Valley fever is common
- Number of susceptible people in areas where Valley fever is common
- Increased disease recognition, testing, and reporting



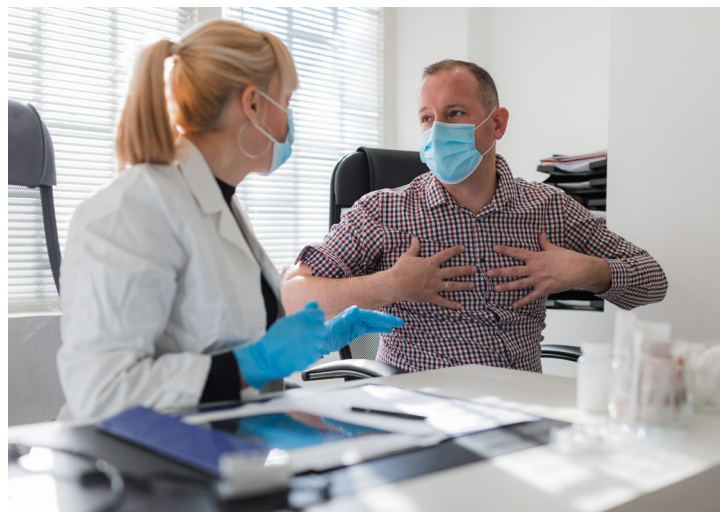
WHO IS AT RISK FOR VALLEY FEVER?

- Anyone who lives, works, or travels in an area where Valley fever has been reported can breathe in the Valley fever fungus from outdoor dust without knowing it and become infected.
- People who spend more time outdoors and are exposed to dirt and dust in areas where Valley fever is common are more likely to get Valley fever.
- Some people are at greater risk of having severe disease if they are infected and may need to be hospitalized:
 - 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 the immune system, such as:
 - Cancer
 - Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection
 - Treatment with chemotherapy, steroids, or other medications that affect the immune system
 - Organ transplant

VALLEY FEVER TALKING POINTS

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS, SYMPTOMS, AND TREATMENT FOR VALLEY FEVER?

- About 60% of people infected have no symptoms, and their bodies fight off the infection naturally.
- People who get sick usually develop symptoms 1-3 weeks after breathing in the fungus from dust in outdoor air.
- The symptoms of Valley fever can be similar to those of other common illnesses (including COVID-19 and the flu), so patients may have delays in getting diagnosed and treated.
- Valley fever usually infects the lungs and can cause respiratory symptoms or pneumonia that can last a month or more.
- Valley fever symptoms include **fatigue, cough, difficulty breathing, fever, night sweats, muscle or joint aches, chest pain, weight loss, headache, and rash**. In most people, the infection will go away on its own, but anyone with symptoms lasting longer than a week should see a healthcare provider.
- When Valley fever is severe, patients may need to be hospitalized, and in rare cases, the infection can spread beyond the lungs to other organs, including the brain, joints, bones, skin, or other organs. Serious illness can occur, resulting in hospitalization, long-term disability, or even death.
- Since Valley fever symptoms are similar to those of other common illnesses, healthcare providers may order a blood test or other tests (such as a chest X-ray) to help diagnose Valley fever.
- Treatment for Valley fever, such as antifungal medications, may be considered or prescribed by a healthcare provider. There are no over-the-counter medications to treat Valley fever.



VALLEY FEVER TALKING POINTS

HOW CAN PEOPLE HELP PREVENT VALLEY FEVER?

- Valley fever can be difficult to prevent, but some practical tips may help to reduce risk of exposure.
- Reducing risk requires avoiding breathing in dirt or dust outside in areas where Valley fever is common.
- When it is windy outside and the air is dusty, especially during dust storms, follow these precautions:
 - Stay inside and keep windows and doors closed.
 - While driving, keep car windows shut and use recirculating air conditioning, if available.
 - If you must be outdoors in dusty air, consider wearing an N95 mask or respirator.
 - N95 respirators are available at drugstores, hardware supply stores, and are also sold online.
 - To be effective, N95 respirators must be fitted properly. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides an instruction video for using disposable respirators.
- When digging or stirring up dust in areas where Valley fever is common:
 - Wet down soil before digging to reduce dust.
 - Stay upwind of the area where dirt is being disturbed to avoid breathing in dust.
 - Consider wearing an N95 mask or respirator (cloth masks and medical masks do **not** provide the same level of protection as N95 masks).

WHAT IS BEING DONE ABOUT VALLEY FEVER IN CALIFORNIA?

- State and local health departments:
 - Monitor the number of people who get Valley fever in California
 - Investigate Valley fever outbreaks to learn more about the disease and how to prevent it
 - Raise awareness of Valley fever among healthcare providers and the public
 - Provide information to employers to help prevent Valley fever in the workplace

For more information, contact your local health department or visit CDPH's Valley fever website: [CouldBeValleyFever.org](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/ValleyFever.aspx).