



COCCIDIOIDOMYCOSIS (Valley Fever)

What is coccidioidomycosis?

Coccidioidomycosis, also known as Valley fever, is an infection caused by the fungus *Coccidioides*. Sometimes it is called San Joaquin Valley fever or desert rheumatism. The term “Valley fever” usually refers to *Coccidioides* infection in the lungs, but the infection can spread to other parts of the body in severe cases, called disseminated coccidioidomycosis.

Who gets coccidioidomycosis?

Anyone who lives in or travels to the southwestern United States (Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, or Utah), or parts of Mexico or Central or South America can get Valley fever. Valley fever can affect people of any age, but it is most common in adults aged 60 and older. Certain groups of people may be at higher risk for developing the severe forms of Valley fever, such as:

- People who have weakened immune systems, for example, people who:
 - Have HIV/AIDS
 - Have had an organ transplant
 - Are taking medications such as corticosteroids or TNF-inhibitors
- Pregnant women
- People who have diabetes
- People who are Black or Filipino.

How is coccidioidomycosis spread?

Coccidioides lives in dust and soil in some areas in the southwestern United States, Mexico, and South America. In the United States, *Coccidioides* lives in Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, and Utah. The fungus was also recently found in south-central Washington. People can get Valley fever by breathing in the microscopic fungal spores from the air in these areas. In extremely rare cases, the spores can enter the skin through a cut, wound, or splinter and cause a skin infection.

What are the symptoms of coccidioidomycosis?

Symptoms of Valley fever include fatigue (tiredness), cough, fever, shortness of breath, headache, night sweats, muscle aches or joint pain, and a rash on the upper body or legs. A common presentation of the rash is as painful or tender, slightly elevated red nodules or bumps, which may change color to bluish to brown and often occur on the legs, but may occur on the chest, arms and back. Many people who are exposed to the fungus *Coccidioides* never have symptoms. Others have symptoms that go away on their own after weeks to months. Individuals with symptoms lasting more than a week should contact their health care provider.

Office of Infectious Disease Epidemiology
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Frequently Asked Questions

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms of Valley fever may appear between one to three weeks after a person breathes in the fungal spores.

Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?

Valley fever is not contagious, so exclusion is not required. However, your health care provider may recommend that staying home to recover.

What is the treatment for coccidioidomycosis?

The treatment is usually three to six months of fluconazole or another type of antifungal medication. However, for many people, the symptoms of Valley fever go away within a few months without any treatment.

What can a person or community do to prevent the spread of coccidioidomycosis?

It is very difficult to avoid breathing in the fungus *Coccidioides* in areas where it is commonly found. People who live in these areas can try to avoid spending time in dusty places. People who are at risk for severe Valley fever (such as people who have weakened immune systems, pregnant women, people who have diabetes, and people who are Black or Filipino) may be able to lower their chances of developing the infection by avoid breathing in the fungal spores. Follow these recommended steps:

- Try to avoid areas with a lot of dust, such as construction or excavation sites, and wear an N95 respirator (a type of face mask) while you are there.
- During dust storms, close windows and stay inside.
- Avoid activities that involve close contact to dirt or dust, such as yard work, gardening, and digging.
- Use air filtration measures indoors.
- Clean skin injuries well with soap and water to reduce the chances of developing a skin infection, especially if the wound was exposed to dirt or dust.
- Take preventive antifungal medication if prescribed by your health care provider.

Resources

Valley Fever Center for Excellence, <https://vfce.arizona.edu/valley-fever-people/faqs>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,
<https://www.cdc.gov/fungal/diseases/coccidioidomycosis/causes.html>