

Valley Fever Information

What is Valley Fever?

Valley fever is an infection caused by a fungus that lives in the soil. About 10,000 U.S. cases are reported each year, mostly from Arizona and California. Valley fever can be misdiagnosed because its symptoms are similar to those of other illnesses. Here are some important things to know about Valley fever, also called coccidioidomycosis.

People can get Valley Fever by breathing in the microscopic fungal spores from the air in these areas. Most people who are exposed to the fungus never have symptoms. In the soil, the spores grow as a mold, with long filaments that break off into airborne spores when the soil is disturbed by digging. The spores are extremely small and can be carried hundreds of miles by the wind. Once inside the lungs, the spores can reproduce, perpetuating the cycle of the disease. Valley Fever does not spread from person to person.

What are the Symptoms of Valley Fever?

Most people who are exposed to the fungus never have symptoms. Other people may have flu-like symptoms, including:

- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Cough
- Fever
- Shortness of breath
- Headache
- Night sweats
- Muscle aches or joint pain
- Rash on upper body or legs

The symptoms of Valley Fever can be similar to other common illnesses, so patients may have delays in getting diagnosed and treated. For many people, symptoms will go away without any treatment, after weeks or months. Healthcare providers prescribe antifungal medication for some people to try to reduce symptoms or prevent the infection from getting worse. People who have severe lung infections or infections that have spread to other parts of the body always need antifungal treatment and may need to stay in the hospital.

Who is at risk for contracting Valley Fever?

Anyone who lives in or travels to an area where the fungus lives in the environment can get Valley Fever. It can affect people of any age, but it's most common in adults ages 60 and older. Or certain group can 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 tumor necrosis factor (TNF) inhibitors
- Pregnant women, particularly those in the third trimester
- People who have diabetes
- People who are black or Filipino

What can I do to protect myself from Valley Fever?

In areas where Valley Fever is common, it's difficult to completely avoid exposure to the fungus because it is in the environment. There is no vaccine to prevent infection. That's why knowing about Valley Fever is one of the most important ways to avoid delays in diagnosis and treatment. People who have Valley Fever symptoms and live in or have visited an area where the fungus is common should ask their doctor to test them for Valley Fever. Healthcare providers should be aware that Valley Fever symptoms are similar to those of other respiratory illnesses and should consider testing for Valley fever in patients with flu-like symptoms who live in or have traveled to an area where *Coccidioides* lives.

What is CVA's Response?

CVA takes Valley Fever very seriously, as our volunteers, at many times, are on the range moving dirt, digging, raking etc.

Range Captains and work party organizers will have **N95** face masks, as recommended by the CDC, to be used while working on the range. There are several stations throughout the range where the masks are available for use by the membership.

We also have updated our club membership Safety Seminar to include a discussion of Valley Fever and its prevention.

If you have more questions about Valley Fever you can check out this link from the Center for Disease Control at the following links

Definition: <https://www.cdc.gov/fungal/diseases/coccidioidomycosis/definition.html>

Risk Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/fungal/diseases/coccidioidomycosis/risk-prevention.html>