

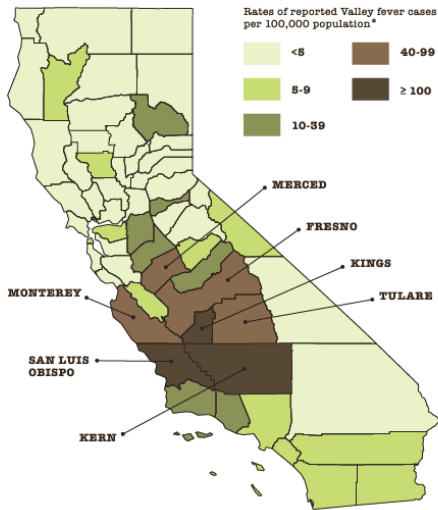


MONTHLY SAFETY TOPIC – SEPTEMBER 2024

Valley Fever Prevention

PLACES WHERE VALLEY FEVER IS COMMON

The fungus grows in the soil throughout the southwestern US, with 97% of cases reported in Arizona and California.



*Epidemiologic Summary of Coccidioidomycosis in California, 2018

Valley Fever cases are on the rise in California, with most infections occurring in late summer and early fall. According to the California Department of Public Health, Valley Fever is a disease caused by the *Coccidioides* fungus that grows in the soil and dirt in certain areas in California. Both people and animals can breathe in the fungus from airborne dust, which usually infects the lungs and can cause respiratory illness, fever, muscle or joint aches, chest pain, and fatigue. Symptoms usually develop within one to three weeks after exposure, can last for weeks or months, and in some cases cause severe, debilitating illness. If you have any of these symptoms and you have been exposed to dust or disturbed soil, it is recommended to see a healthcare provider.

Coccidioides is thought to grow best in the soil after heavy rainfall and then disperse into the air most effectively during hot, dry conditions. *Coccidioides* spores circulate in the air after contaminated soil and dust are disturbed by humans, animals, or the weather. When people breathe in the spores, they are at risk for developing Valley Fever. Since *Coccidioides* can be present in the top two to twelve inches of soil, employees who work outdoors are at a higher risk of infection than those who work inside. The best way to reduce your risk of getting Valley Fever is to avoid breathing in dirt or dust in areas where the fungus is common.

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 it.
-  Change out of dusty clothes after being outdoors.
-  Be careful not to shake out clothing and breathe in the dust before washing.

Other preventative measures you can take include:

- When it is windy outside, and the air is dusty, especially during dust storms, stay indoors and keep windows and doors closed.
- While driving in dusty areas, keep car windows closed and use “recirculating” air conditioning if available.
- Wet down soil before disturbing it to reduce dust.
- Use soil stabilizers or reduce dirt by re-vegetation.
- When exposure is unavoidable, consider wearing an N95 mask/respirator.
- Suspend work or play during heavy winds in dusty areas.
- Position yourself upwind of any areas where soil is being disturbed.

SYMPTOMS OF VALLEY FEVER

If you’ve had any of these symptoms for more than a week, especially if you’ve tested negative for COVID-19 or recently been outdoors in a dusty area, it’s time to ask a doctor, “Could it be Valley fever?”



Learn more:
COULDBEVALLEYFEVER.ORG
