



**COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO HEALTH AGENCY
PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Health Officials Urge Residents to Be Aware of Valley Fever Risk, Seek Care if Needed
*More than three times as many cases reported in 2018 over same period in 2017***

San Luis Obispo—In the first six months of this year, 283 cases of Valley Fever (coccidioidomycosis) were reported in San Luis Obispo County—compared to 91 cases in the first six months of 2017. This increase is especially concerning because 2017 saw the highest number of cases on record in California, and because case counts typically increase in the second half of the year. This increase is similar to patterns emerging across the state.

In light of this increase, the Public Health Department reminds residents to be aware of the risk of Valley Fever, take precautions to protect themselves, and seek medical attention if needed.

Valley Fever is caused by breathing in a fungus which lives naturally in the soil in parts of California and the southwest. When the soil is disturbed—by wind, construction, gardening, biking or other activities—people can breathe in the spores from this fungus and develop Valley Fever. People most commonly come in contact with the fungus in dusty air during the dry, windy summer months, and are often diagnosed in the second half of the year.

“The fungus that causes Valley Fever is here in SLO County soil, and we all need to be aware of the risk,” said Dr. Penny Borenstein, Health Officer of the County of San Luis Obispo. “If you have a cough, fever, exhaustion and painful breathing for more than two weeks, tell your doctor and ask to be tested for Valley Fever.”

More than 60 percent of people who become infected with Valley Fever do not experience any symptoms and do not need treatment. Around 30-40 percent of people develop sudden flu-like symptoms. Most of these people get well on their own within weeks. A small percentage—between one and five percent—experience a much more serious form of the disease in which the infection spreads through the body. People who experience this serious form of Valley Fever are at risk of dying from complications of the disease and may need to take medication for the rest of their lives. Some people are more at risk for this serious form of the disease, including people with compromised immune systems (including people with HIV/AIDS, people currently on chemotherapy, women who are pregnant, and others) and people of African and Asian-Pacific descent.

To reduce the risk of Valley Fever:

- **Limit your exposure to dust and airborne dirt.** Try to avoid areas with a lot of dust, especially on windy days. If you need to spend time in a dusty area, skip windy days and

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dampen the soil to prevent it from drifting into the air. During dust storms or when driving down a dusty road, close your windows and set the vent to recirculate.

- **Tell your doctor.** If you experience flu-like symptoms for more than several weeks and suspect you have breathed dusty air, tell your doctor and ask to be tested for Valley Fever. The symptoms of Valley Fever can be similar to other illnesses, so your doctor will likely check several possibilities before determining whether Valley Fever is the cause.

California's extended drought followed by several rainy winters may have created conditions for the fungus to rapidly grow in the soil. The total number of Valley Fever cases diagnosed in San Luis Obispo County in recent years includes:

- 2017: 368
- 2016: 257
- 2015: 53
- 2014: 33
- 2013: 82
- 2012: 135
- 2011: 165
- 2010: 152

August marks Valley Fever Awareness Month in San Luis Obispo County and across California.

For more information, visit www.slocounty.ca.gov/valley-fever.

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