

VALLEY FEVER: KNOW THE RISK, PROTECT YOUR HEALTH

Valley Fever is a disease caused by a fungus in the soil here in San Luis Obispo County. You can reduce your risk and seek treatment if you become sick.



A COLLABORATION OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE / WEIGHTS & MEASURES
AND THE PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM VALLEY FEVER

The best way to protect yourself from Valley Fever is to avoid breathing in dirt or dust. This includes actions you and your family can take from day to day:

- Avoid areas with a lot of dust, especially on windy days.
- During dust storms, stay inside and close your windows.
- On dusty roads, close your car windows and set the vent to recirculate.

FOR ACTIVITIES THAT STIR UP DIRT OR DUST:

- Skip windy days.
- Postpone activity until wind calms down.
- Do activity in early morning hours when there is less wind.
- Wet down roadways and dampen soil to reduce blowing dust, especially around other workers.
- If other workers are nearby or downwind, delay the activity until they move.
- Use equipment with an enclosed cab and air filtration system.
- Remove and bag coveralls and other dusty clothing when you leave the work site, so you don't bring dust into your car or home.

What about masks? A simple dust mask may provide some protection, and a medically fit-tested respirator can provide more protection. However, these respirators can restrict oxygen flow and may be difficult to wear correctly when doing physical work. It is important to follow the steps above whether or not you wear a mask.

If you have a condition that weakens your immune system—such as diabetes, HIV/AIDS, pregnancy, or treatments such as corticosteroid therapy or chemotherapy—consider avoiding activities that stir up dust.

WHAT IS VALLEY FEVER?

Valley Fever (Coccidioidomycosis or cocci), is a disease caused by the spores of a fungus that lives in soil here in San Luis Obispo County and across parts of California and the southwest United States, as well as Mexico, Central America and South America. When soil is disturbed by wind, construction, farming, digging, earthquakes, or other activities, the fungal spores can drift into the air. People and animals can breathe in these spores and develop Valley Fever. The spores can infect lungs, and in some cases spread to other parts of the body. In less than 1% of cases, Valley Fever can be fatal.

HOW COMMON IS VALLEY FEVER?

In 2017, more than 355 cases of Valley Fever were diagnosed in San Luis Obispo County. This is an increase over recent years. The fungus that causes Valley Fever can be found throughout San Luis Obispo County.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Most people (60%) do not experience symptoms, and recover on their own without treatment. Some people experience flu-like symptoms one to three weeks after breathing the spores that cause Valley Fever. Symptoms include:

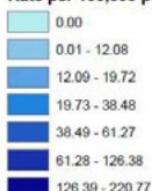
- fever
- coughing
- chest pain
- shortness of breath
- body aches
- joint pain
- skin rash
- night sweats
- fatigue

Most people with these symptoms get well on their own in about a month, although full return of energy may take up to six months. In a small percentage of people, it spreads to other parts of the body. Signs of this serious illness include:

- very high fever
- extreme fatigue
- nodules or ulcers on the skin
- painful lesions on the skull, spine, or bones
- painful, swollen joints
- headaches or back pain

San Luis Obispo County Valley Fever Rates per 100,000 | 2005 -2015

Rate per 100,000 persons



PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT
EPIDEMIOLOGY

People can get Valley Fever anywhere in San Luis Obispo County. More cases occur in the north and east parts of the county, where conditions are often more dusty and windy. Low rates in an area do not mean there is no risk.

HOW IS IT TREATED?

Most people recover on their own with no treatment. People who do not get better on their own may need to take an antifungal medicine.

In severe cases, patients may need surgery and may need to take medicine for the rest of their lives. People who have this serious form of Valley Fever are at risk of dying from complications of the disease.

IS VALLEY FEVER CONTAGIOUS?

No, Valley Fever is not spread from person to person, and you cannot catch it from animals.

You can only get Valley Fever if you breathe in the fungal spores in dirt or dust.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I GET SICK? IS IT VALLEY FEVER?

If you may have breathed in dirt or dust and are experiencing flu-like symptoms that do not improve after several weeks:

Go to your health care provider and ask to be tested for Valley Fever.

This could be your doctor, hospital, or urgent care clinic.

Be sure to tell your health care provider that you may have been exposed to Valley Fever.

WHO GETS VALLEY FEVER?

Anyone who lives, works, or visits an area where Valley Fever occurs can get the disease. Valley Fever affects both people and animals. People who spend time in dusty activities such as farm work, construction work and off-road biking are more likely to be exposed.

Most people who become infected (60%) do not feel sick and do not need treatment. Of the 30-40% who feel sick, most experience sudden flu-like symptoms and recover without treatment. Of those, a small percent of people (1-5%) experience a serious illness in which Valley Fever spreads throughout the body. This occurs more often in people of Hispanic, African-American, Native American, and Filipino descent, and people who have conditions that weaken the immune system. Those conditions include diabetes, HIV/AIDS, pregnancy, and treatments such as chronic corticosteroid therapy and chemotherapy.

HOW IS VALLEY FEVER DIAGNOSED?

Your doctor may order a blood test or test of other body fluids such as sputum. These tests are considered reliable only after you have had symptoms for three weeks or more. Chest X-rays may show lung problems associated with Valley Fever. A skin test may show if you have ever been exposed to Valley Fever, but does not show whether you are currently infected. If a test comes back negative for Valley Fever, your doctor may repeat the test later.

QUESTIONS?

The Public Health Department is here to help you protect yourself and others from Valley Fever. If you have questions, please contact:

County of San Luis Obispo Public Health Department
805-781-5500
www.slopublichealth.org

SHARE THIS INFORMATION

If you would like brochures or posters to share, call the Public Health Department at 805-781-5500.

Many excellent resources about Valley Fever are available online. To access a list of recommended resources, visit: www.slocounty.ca.gov/valley-fever.