

Facts about Valley Fever

Valley fever, or coccidioidomycosis, is an illness caused by fungal spores found in the soil in the southwestern United States and south-central Washington. Valley fever is contracted by breathing in spores from soil or airborne dust particles. Valley fever is typically not contagious (cannot spread person-to-person).

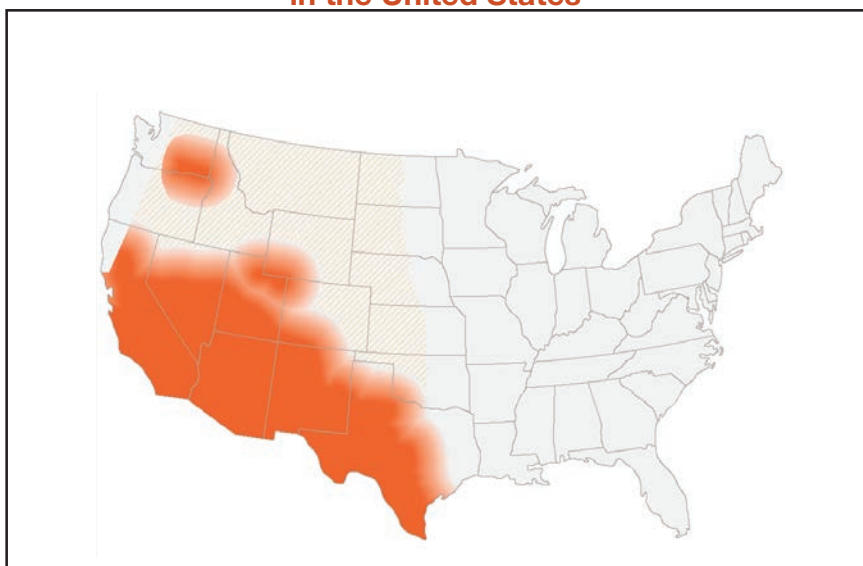
Many people exposed to Valley fever never have symptoms. Others may develop symptoms one to three weeks following exposure to contaminated soil or dust.

Symptoms

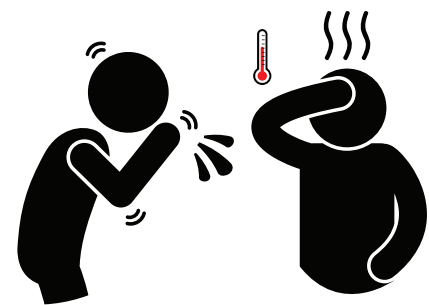
- Fatigue (extreme tiredness)
- Cough
- Fever
- Shortness of breath
- Headache
- Night sweats
- Muscle aches or joint pain
- Rash on upper body or legs

Symptoms usually last for a few weeks to a few months, while severe cases may extend beyond this. Individuals who develop symptoms consistent with Valley fever and seek medical care may be asked by their healthcare providers to complete a medical and travel history, to provide information about their symptoms, and to undergo physical examinations and laboratory tests to accurately diagnose Valley fever. In some cases, Valley fever can cause severe illness. This is more common in individuals with certain risk factors.

Estimated areas with coccidioidomycosis (Valley fever) in the United States



Coccidioides is not distributed evenly in the shaded areas, might not be present everywhere in the shaded areas, and can also be outside the shaded areas. Darker shading shows areas where *Coccidioides* is more likely to live. Diagonal shading shows the potential range of *Coccidioides*.



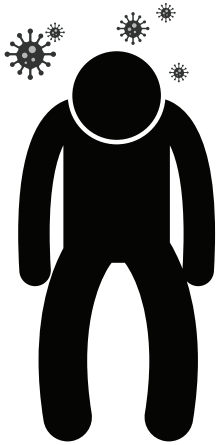
Cough and fever are common symptoms of Valley fever.

Sources of infection

Valley fever does not spread from person to person. People and animals can get Valley fever by breathing in the fungal spores from the environment in certain areas of the western U.S. and parts of Mexico and Central and South America. The fungus was also recently found in south-central Washington.

Source: US Centers For Disease Control and Prevention

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Wildland fire tasks associated with increased risk for exposure

- Being in close proximity to helicopter operations due to rotor wash.
- Digging or prepping fireline, mopping up (suppression efforts), hiking or traveling in areas with loose soil (dozer line, handline).
- Working around and operating heavy equipment.
- Working in camps with high traffic and minimal dust control

Diagnosis

Healthcare providers rely on your medical and travel history, symptoms, physical exams, and laboratory tests to diagnose Valley fever. The most common way that healthcare providers test for Valley fever is by taking a blood sample and sending it to a laboratory to look for *Coccidioides* antibodies or antigens. They might also collect a sputum sample and send it to a lab for examination. Healthcare providers may also do imaging tests such as chest x-rays or CT scans of your lungs.

Treatment

For many people, symptoms will go away without any treatment. Healthcare providers choose to prescribe antifungal medication for some people to try to reduce symptoms or prevent the infection from getting worse. The treatment is usually 3 to 6 months of fluconazole or another type of antifungal medication. People who have severe lung infections or infections that have spread to other parts of the body always need treatment and may need to stay in the hospital. For these types of infections, the course of treatment is usually longer than 6 months.

Prevention

It's very difficult to avoid breathing in the fungus *Coccidioides* in areas where it's common in the environment.

People who are at risk for severe Valley fever may be able to lower their chances of developing the infection by trying to avoid breathing in the fungal spores. The following are some common-sense methods that may be helpful to avoid getting Valley fever, but it's important to know that they haven't been proven to prevent it.

Other Resources

6 Minutes For Safety: Valley Fever

<https://www.nwcc.gov/6mfs/firefighter-health-first-aid/valley-fever>

Valley Fever RLS

https://lessonslearned-prod-media-bucket.s3.us-gov-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2023-02/Valley_Fever2_RLS.pdf

University of Arizona Valley Fever Center for Excellence

<https://vfce.arizona.edu/>



Some people with Valley fever will need prescription antifungal treatment.



People can get Valley fever by breathing in the fungus *Coccidioides* from the environment.

For more information:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious
Diseases, Division of Foodborne, Waterborne, and
Environmental Diseases
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Atlanta, GA 30329-4018

800-CDC-INFO (232-4636) cdcinfo@cdc.gov

www.cdc.gov/fungal