

Valley Fever (Coccidioidomycosis) – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

What is Valley Fever?

Valley fever, also called coccidioidomycosis or “cocci,” is an infection caused by the fungus *Coccidioides*, which lives in the soil in certain parts of California and the southwestern United States. When dust or soil containing the fungus is inhaled, it can infect the lungs, leading to symptoms such as cough, fever, chest pain, or fatigue. While many people experience mild illness, some may develop severe or long-lasting disease. In rare cases, the infection spreads beyond the lungs to other parts of the body (disseminated Valley Fever).

How do people get Valley Fever?

People get Valley fever by breathing in dust containing *Coccidioides* spores. Activities such as construction, digging, farming, gardening, or being outdoors on windy days in areas where it is dusty can increase exposure risk.

- Valley Fever cannot spread from person to person or from animals to humans.
- Pets and animals can also get Valley fever from breathing in contaminated dust.

When and where does Valley Fever occur?

Valley fever can occur year-round but is more common in late summer and fall.

- In California, the Central Valley, Central Coast, and parts of Southern California report the highest rates.
- It also occurs in Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Texas, and parts of Mexico and Central/South America.
- In Riverside County, the highest proportion of cases are reported in the Northwest area of the County.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms usually appear **1–3 weeks after exposure** and may include:

- Fatigue and weakness
- Fever and chills
- Persistent cough or chest pain
- Night sweats
- Headaches
- Muscle or joint aches

Rash on the upper body or legs. Most people recover fully without treatment, but some may develop severe or chronic illness lasting months or longer.

Who is at greater risk for severe disease?

While anyone can get Valley fever, some groups are at higher risk for severe or disseminated disease, including:

- Adults over 60
- People of African or Filipino ancestry
- Pregnant women (especially in later pregnancy)
- People with diabetes
- Individuals with weakened immune systems (e.g., HIV/AIDS, cancer, organ transplant, or immunosuppressive medications)

How is Valley Fever diagnosed and treated?

Diagnosis is made using blood tests, imaging (like chest x-rays), and laboratory tests.

- Mild infections often improve without treatment.
- More serious cases may require antifungal medications prescribed by a healthcare provider.

How can I reduce my risk?

Steps to reduce risk include:

- Staying indoors with windows and doors closed on windy or dusty days
- Using “recirculate” mode on car air conditioning while driving in dusty areas
- Wetting soil before digging or disturbing it (e.g., gardening)

There is no vaccine to prevent Valley fever.

When to Seek Medical Care

Contact your healthcare provider if you have worsening respiratory symptoms lasting more than a week, especially if you live, work, or have traveled to areas where Valley fever is common. Early testing and treatment can prevent serious complications.

What is being done in Riverside County?

RUHS-Public Health along with California Department of Public Health (CDPH) track Valley fever cases, investigate outbreaks, and provide education to the public and healthcare providers. Efforts are underway to improve awareness, prevention, and early diagnosis.

Where can I get more information?

- [CDPH – Coccidioidomycosis \(Valley Fever\)](#)
- [CDC – Valley Fever](#)
- [RUHS- Valley Fever](#)