

What is coccidiomycosis?

Valley fever, also called coccidioidomycosis, is an infection caused by the fungus *Coccidioides immitis* or *Coccidioides posadasii*. The fungi thrive in the arid desert soils of southwestern United States, northern Mexico, California's San Joaquin Valley, Texas, and parts of Central and South America — areas with mild winters and arid summers.

How is coccidiomycosis spread?

Valley fever is not contagious; it cannot be spread from an infected person or animal to another person. The fungi's spores can be stirred into the air by anything that disrupts the soil, such as farming, construction and wind. People become infected when they inhale spores.

What are the signs and symptoms of coccidiomycosis?

Many people who are exposed to the fungus never have symptoms. Other people may have flu-like symptoms that go usually away on their own after weeks to months. Valley fever is the initial form of coccidioidomycosis infection. Symptoms include:

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

How long after infection do symptoms appear?

When signs and symptoms do occur, they appear one to three weeks after exposure.

Who is most at risk?

- People over 60 years of age
- People with a weakened immune system
- Pregnant women
- People who are Black or Filipino
- People who develop signs and symptoms of Valley fever, especially those who:
 - Live in or have recently traveled to an area where this disease is common
 - Have symptoms that aren't improving

What type of health problems are caused by coccidiomycosis?

If the initial coccidioidomycosis infection (Valley fever) doesn't completely resolve, it may progress to a chronic (long-term) form of pneumonia. This complication is most common in people with weakened immune systems.

The most serious form of the disease, disseminated coccidioidomycosis, occurs when the infection spreads (disseminates) beyond the lungs to other parts of the body. Most often, this includes the skin, bones, liver, brain, heart, and the membranes that protect the brain and spinal cord (meninges).

How is coccidiomycosis diagnosed?

The diagnosis of coccidiomycosis is made by finding the fungus in the patient's sputum, pus, urine, cerebrospinal fluid, tissue or blood.

How is coccidiomycosis treated?

Most people with acute (short-term) Valley fever don't require treatment. Even when symptoms are severe, the best therapy for otherwise healthy adults is often bed rest and fluids. If symptoms don't improve or become worse, or if you are at increased risk of serious illness, your healthcare provider may prescribe an antifungal medication.

For many people, a single bout of Valley fever provides lifelong immunity, but the disease can be reactivated, or you can be reinfected if your immune system is very weak.

How can coccidiomycosis be prevented?

If you live in or visit areas where Valley fever is common, take commonsense precautions, especially during the summer months when the chance of infection is highest. Consider wearing a mask, staying inside during dust storms, wetting the soil before digging, and keeping doors and windows tightly closed.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal healthcare provider
- [Centers for Disease Control & Prevention](#)
- [Utah Department of Health](#)

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