

Questions and Answers about Valley Fever

(Coccidioidomycosis or “cocci”)

Q What is Valley Fever?

A Valley Fever is an infection in the lungs caused by a fungus (*Coccidiocces immitis*) that grows in the soil in the southwestern United States, parts of Mexico and South America. In Los Angeles County, the fungus is commonly found in areas of West Valley and Antelope Valley.

Q How do you get Valley Fever?

A Infection begins when one or more airborne spores of the fungus are inhaled. These fungal spores become airborne when the soil is disturbed by winds, construction, farming and other activities. (Fifteen trillion spores would fit into a cubic inch.) Valley Fever is *not* spread from person to person.

Q What are the symptoms?

A Most people have no symptoms or only mild flu-like symptoms and do not see a doctor. The most common symptoms of patients with Valley Fever are fatigue, cough, fever, profuse sweating at night, loss of appetite, chest pain, headache and muscle and joint aches particularly of the ankles and knees. Some people develop red bumps on their shins or forearms that gradually turn brown. A small percentage of people (such as those with HIV/AIDS or diabetes) may develop severe pulmonary disease or other complications (such as meningitis and/or infections of soft tissues, joints, and bone).

Q Is treatment available?

A In most cases, the body can fight off infection and no specific course of treatment is necessary. The usual course of disease in healthy people is complete recovery within six months. Antifungal drugs may be needed for severe cases.

Q How can I prevent getting Valley Fever?

A There is no vaccine to prevent Valley Fever at this time. Avoid activities that involve dust, airborne dirt, or native desert soil. Some occupations recommend wearing masks. Use common sense and stay out of blowing dust.