

Coccidioidomycosis (Valley Fever)

Valley fever is caused by a fungus. The fungus is found in southern Arizona, central California, southern New Mexico, west Texas and parts of Central and Southern America.

A person gets the disease when they breathe in fungus spores. The spores may stay in the lungs or spread through the body.

When valley fever spreads in the body, about one out of four people get meningitis. This is a disease where the outer layer of the brain and the spinal cord swell. It can often lead to brain damage or death.

Symptoms

There are three forms:

- Acute. It shows up within three weeks of contact with the fungus. It is often mild with few signs. It goes away without treatment.
- Chronic. This form can show up 20 or more years after contact with the fungus.
- Widespread. This form may affect the bones, lungs, liver, brain, spinal cord, skin and heart. In people with HIV, this can spread quickly. Meningitis occurs in about half of those with this form of valley fever.

Symptoms of valley fever include:

- Cough
- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Fever
- Feeling very tired
- Pneumonia
- A skin rash. The spots can range from tender red bumps to purple blisters or ulcers. They

hold the fungus and are a sign of the widespread form of this disease.

- Pain that moves from joint to joint
- Chills
- Night sweats
- Blood in your spit

Call your doctor if you have these symptoms, lose a lot of weight or have night sweats for three weeks or more.

If Valley Fever infects the brain, a person may be confused or not able to focus. They may cringe or be hurt by bright light. There may also be signs of a change in mental status. A person with these signs should go to a doctor or ER right away.

Causes and Risk Factors

Outbreaks of valley fever rise after dust storms, earthquakes or where large areas of dirt are dug up.

People with weak immune systems, diabetes and pregnant women are at greater risk than others.

How to Know You Have Valley Fever

Your doctor will do an exam. They may also test your spit or blood, or do a chest X-ray or a skin test to check for valley fever. The doctor may collect a small piece of tissue to take a closer look.

If there are signs of meningitis, the doctor may test your brain function.

Treatment

Valley fever can be fatal, so treatment should start as soon as it can.

Amphotericin B is often used first. It is a very strong drug and may cause kidney damage. Other meds have fewer side effects. Your doctor may choose one of these.

Treatment can last a year or more. Even with treatment, Valley Fever may come back.

For more information

Contact your Registered Nurse Care Manager, or call Positive Healthcare's Nurse Advice Line at: (800) 797-1717.

