

Coccidioidomycosis—Valley Fever

Frequently Asked Questions

What is coccidioidomycosis?

Coccidioidomycosis, also known as Valley Fever, is a lung infection caused by breathing in microscopic spores from a fungus called *Coccidioides*. The fungus lives in soil and dust.

How is coccidioidomycosis spread?

The disease is spread when soil or dust that contains *Coccidioides* spores is disturbed, and the spores become airborne and are inhaled. Activities such as windstorms, construction or digging can release spores into the air. It does not spread between people or between people and animals.

Where is coccidioidomycosis found?

The fungus that causes coccidioidomycosis lives in soil in [endemic areas](#) such as the Pacific Northwest and southwestern United States, and parts of Mexico, Central America, and South America. It is not currently known to be present in New Jersey. Specific signs and symptoms vary by the type of VHF, but initial signs and symptoms often include:

Who gets coccidioidomycosis?

Anyone who breathes in the spores can become infected. However, people who live in or travel to [areas where the fungus is found](#) are at higher risk. Cats and dogs can also be infected.

What are the symptoms of coccidioidomycosis?

Symptoms of coccidioidomycosis include nonspecific symptoms, such as tiredness, cough, shortness of breath, headache, night sweats, and muscle aches or joint pain. Some patients develop a characteristic rash. Approximately 5-10% of patients develop serious or long-term problems in their lungs. Rarely, the infection could spread from the lungs to other parts of the body, including the central nervous system, skin, bones, or joints.

Risk factors for severe illness include: pregnant individuals, people who have weakened immune systems, people who have diabetes, people who are Black or Filipino, and people over 60 years of age.

How is coccidioidomycosis diagnosed?

If a health care provider suspects coccidioidomycosis, samples of the patient's blood or other body fluids or tissue will be examined for the presence of the fungus or antibodies.

What is the treatment for coccidioidomycosis?

Many people with coccidioidomycosis recover on their own. However, antifungal medications may be needed for people with severe or widespread diseases, or for those whose symptoms do not improve.

How can coccidioidomycosis be prevented?

There is no vaccine to prevent coccidioidomycosis, and it is difficult to avoid breathing in the fungus in areas where it lives in the environment. To reduce your risk of exposure to the fungus, avoid dust exposures in endemic areas by staying indoors during dust storms or high winds, and avoid activities that disturb soil such as construction sites, digging, gardening, off-road biking, and desert hiking during windy conditions. If dust exposure in endemic areas is unavoidable, it is recommended to wear a N95 mask and long sleeves, pants and closed shoes while outdoors. Showering and changing clothes after heavy dust exposure and cleansing skin injuries with soap and water can help prevent infection as well.

Where can I get more information?

- Your healthcare provider
- Your local health department
- New Jersey Department of Health Website: www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/valleyfever.shtml
- CDC Website: <https://www.cdc.gov/valley-fever/index.html>

This information is intended for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation with a healthcare professional. Adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization.