



News Release

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 16, 2018

PH18-041

CONTACT: Corey Egel | 916.440.7259 | CDPHpress@cdph.ca.gov

Valley Fever Cases Continued to Increase in California in 2017

SACRAMENTO - The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) announced today the highest annual number of new Valley Fever cases on record in California was reported in 2017.

From January through December 2017, 7,466 new cases of Valley Fever were reported to CDPH, making 2017 the highest annual incidence reported in California since coccidioidomycosis became individually reportable in 1995. It was also the second consecutive record year for reported Valley Fever cases.

Consistent with previous years, the highest coccidioidomycosis incidence in 2017 were reported in counties in the Central Valley and central coast regions, including Kern, Kings, San Luis Obispo, Fresno, Tulare, Madera, and Monterey counties. Nearly 64% of the 2017 case-patients resided in one of these counties, with 37% residing in Kern County.

“With the continued increase in Valley Fever, people living and working in the Central Valley and central coasts regions should take steps to avoid breathing in dusty air,” said CDPH Director and State Public Health Officer Dr. Karen Smith. “If individuals develop flu-like symptoms, such as cough, fever, or difficulty breathing, lasting two weeks or more, they should ask their health care provider about Valley Fever.”

Valley Fever, also known as coccidioidomycosis, or cocci, is caused by breathing in the spores of a fungus that grows in certain types of soil. The fungal spores can be present in dust that gets into the air when it is windy or when soil is disturbed, such as through digging in dirt during construction.

Most infected people will not show signs of illness. Those who do become ill with Valley Fever may have flu-like symptoms that can last for two weeks or more. While most people recover fully, some may develop more severe complications which include pneumonia, or infection of the brain, joints, bone, skin, or other organs. There is

currently no vaccine, but antifungal medications are available. Individuals should specifically ask their health care provider about Valley Fever if they think they may be infected.

While anyone can get Valley Fever, those most at-risk for severe disease include people 60 years or older, African-Americans, Filipinos, pregnant women, and people with diabetes or conditions that weaken their immune system. People who live, work, or travel in Valley Fever areas are also at higher risk of getting infected, especially if they work outdoors or participate in activities where soil is disturbed.

A person can reduce the risk of illness by avoiding breathing in dirt or dust in areas where Valley Fever is common. In these areas, when it is windy outside and the air is dusty, stay inside and keep windows and doors closed. While driving, keep car windows closed and use recirculating air conditioning, if available. If individuals must be outdoors, they should consider wearing a properly fitted mask when the air is dusty (such as an N95 respirator mask which is widely available in retail stores), and refrain from disturbing the soil whenever possible.

Employers should train workers about Valley Fever symptoms and take steps to limit workers' exposure to dust, such as watering down the soil before digging.

It is unclear why there has been such a large increase in reported Valley Fever cases in California since 2014. Possible contributing factors include heavy rainfall after years of drought as well as other climatic and environmental factors, increased number of susceptible people in areas where the fungus is present, and increased awareness, testing, and diagnosis by health care providers. It is unknown if or how the relatively dry 2017-2018 winter in California will impact the number of Valley Fever cases this year.

For additional information on Valley Fever, please visit the [CDPH website](#).

www.cdph.ca.gov