

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

#2023-11
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Valley Fever Infection Rates on the Rise in San Joaquin County

Stockton, CA (November 3, 2023) – San Joaquin County Public Health Services, in collaboration with the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), is reminding residents that Valley Fever remains an ongoing problem in the county, and positive exposure rates are beginning to rise.

When compared to Valley Fever infection rates in 2020-2022, researchers have seen a significant spike for this year, even considering the normally higher rates found in the Central Valley and Central Coast regions of California. Cases have risen in San Joaquin County from an average of 11 cases (2020-2022) during the month of October, to 31 cases in 2023 – a nearly 200% differential.

Valley Fever, also known as coccidioidomycosis, or “cocci”, is caused by breathing in the spores of a fungus that grows in soil and dirt. The fungal spores, which are too small to see, can be present in dust that gets into the air when it is windy or when soil is disturbed, such as when digging during construction, for example. This fungus often infects the lungs and can cause respiratory symptoms including cough, fever, chest pain, and/or fatigue.

While Valley Fever and COVID-19 share many of the same symptoms, Valley Fever symptoms can last a month or more, but laboratory tests are needed to distinguish between the two. If a person tests negative for COVID-19 but has lingering respiratory symptoms that last more than a week, they should consult their doctor and ask to be tested for Valley Fever.

“With the continued increase in Valley Fever cases, people living, working, or traveling in the Central Valley and Central Coast regions of California should take steps to avoid breathing in dusty air outside,” said Dr. Erica Pan, CDPH Deputy Director, Center for Infectious Diseases and State Epidemiologist. “Although the symptoms of Valley Fever can be like those of COVID-19, it’s important that individuals with lingering cough and fatigue also talk to a healthcare provider about Valley Fever, especially if they have been outdoors in dusty air. People who work primarily outdoors, such as construction workers and others that dig or disturb soil, should learn more about symptoms and ways to prevent Valley Fever infection.”

“The risk associated with breathing in coccidioidomycosis spores is still not taken as seriously in this region by the general public as we would like to see,” stated Dr. Maggie Park, Public Health Officer with San Joaquin County Public Health Services. “ The recently increased soil moisture feeds these fungal spores, and it is something residents should be aware of when outside on windy days.”

A person can reduce their risk of Valley Fever exposure by taking precautionary steps to avoid breathing in dust:

- When it is windy outside and the air is dusty, stay indoors and keep windows and doors closed.
- While driving, keep car windows closed and use recirculating air conditioning, if available.
- If individuals must be outdoors in dusty areas, they should consider wearing a properly fitted N-95 mask.

San Joaquin County Public Health Services encourages residents to learn about the signs and symptoms of Valley Fever and the ways to reduce the risk of infection. Employers with outdoor workers should train workers about Valley Fever symptoms and take steps to limit workers' exposure to airborne dust, such as watering down soil before digging. Also, those engaged in off-road recreational activities, where airborne dust exposure is common, should have goggles and mask protection.

For additional information on Valley Fever, visit CDPH's Valley Fever website, www.CouldBeValleyFever.org.

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