



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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REPORTED CASES OF VALLEY FEVER INCREASE SIGNIFICANTLY IN SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY

Keep Your Risk Low

Stockton, CA (October 5, 2017) - The increasing numbers of reported cases of Valley Fever in San Joaquin County is a growing concern to local public health officials. The number of cases of Coccidioidomycosis (also known as Valley Fever or Cocci) in San Joaquin County (SJC) has tripled between 2013 and 2016. As of October 4, there are 128 cases reported in SJC for 2017. Since the majority of SJC cases are reported in November and December, the total number of cases in 2017 could surpass 2016, so it is important to raise awareness now. Dr. Karen Furst, San Joaquin County Assistant Health Officer, emphasized, "There is no reason for the public to be alarmed; but it is important to understand the cause and symptoms of this disease, and take steps to decrease the risk of getting infected."

What is Valley Fever? The disease is caused by *Coccidioides immitis*, a fungus that lives in the soil primarily in the southwestern United States (i.e., Arizona, California, New Mexico and Nevada), and northwestern Mexico. People get exposed when the fungal spores become airborne and are inhaled into the lungs. These spores can get into the air when dirt is disturbed by humans or nature such as when digging, during construction, or from strong winds and dust clouds. In California, the cocci fungus is predominantly reported in counties of the San Joaquin Valley and Central Coast. **For San Joaquin County, the highest rates are found in the Tracy area.** Exposures are more common during the dry months of summer and fall, with most cases reported in the fall and early winter.

What are the symptoms? Approximately 60% of people infected with cocci do not develop any symptoms. The others develop symptoms about 1-3 weeks after getting exposed. The disease usually affects the lungs, causing symptoms that include extreme tiredness, fever, body aches, pains, cough, and rash. Most people's acute symptoms resolve in about a month, but fatigue can continue for several months. In some, the disease spreads to other parts of the body such as the bones, skin, joints or brain. In these rare cases, the disease is very serious and may even cause death. If you think you have Valley Fever, contact your healthcare provider.

Who gets Valley Fever? Illness may occur in residents or visitors in an infected area. People most likely to be exposed are those working outside in dusty occupations, such as farm and construction workers, or others who breathe in dust from the dirt in areas

-more-

where there are fungal spores. This may include exposures while gardening, off-road motor vehicle recreation, etc. Persons between the ages of 25 and 55 are most likely to develop symptoms of the disease - although people of all ages can have symptoms.

Groups at higher risk for severe disease include people 60 years or older, African Americans, Filipinos, Latinos, pregnant women, and people with diabetes or conditions that weaken their immune system. Most people who get Valley Fever fully recover and are usually protected from getting Valley Fever again.

How is Valley Fever diagnosed? Valley Fever is diagnosed by a doctor. Your doctor can order a blood test, chest x-ray, or other tests. Increased knowledge about the disease may lead to early diagnosis and treatment that could help prevent complications.

What is the treatment? If you are diagnosed with Valley Fever, your doctor will determine if you need treatment with antifungal medications. For more severe disease a number of medications are now available. Occasionally surgery is recommended to remove a diseased portion of the lung, bone or skin.

How can the risk of Valley Fever be reduced? Currently, there is no vaccine to prevent Valley Fever. The infection is not spread from person to person or from animals to people. Avoid exposure to dusty air in areas where the fungus 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. The risk for exposure to the cocci spores are highest during the dry months of the summer and fall. Those exposed to dust during their jobs or other outside activities should consider using respiratory protection, such as wearing a close-fitting dust mask. Other measures include controlling dust, such as use of watering at construction sites. Early recognition of symptoms and seeking prompt medical care is important.

For more information visit:

- San Joaquin County Public Health Services, <http://www.sjcphs.org>
- California Department of Public Health, <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Coccidioidomycosis.aspx>

Attachments:

- *Coccidioidomycosis (Valley Fever) Data Sheet, San Joaquin County (pdf)*
- *What you need to know about Valley Fever in San Joaquin County & California (brochure, pdf)*

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Coccidioidomycosis (Valley Fever) Data Sheet San Joaquin County

Coccidioidomycosis (Valley Fever or “cocci”) is an infection caused by a fungus (*Coccidioides*) that lives in the soil and dirt. In California, cocci is common in the San Joaquin Valley and Central Coast, but the number of cases in California have been increasing in the past several years. The main reason for the increase is not well understood. In 2010, laboratories were required to report results, but this only partially accounts for the increase since it remains the highest in the San Joaquin Valley and Central Coast. One reason might be due to the droughts followed by rainy seasons with windy conditions, which are the ideal environments for the growth and release of the fungus. ¹

- 🌿 In 2016, San Joaquin County had the 7th highest rate in CA (data not shown).¹
- 🌿 Specifically, in San Joaquin County, the highest rates are in the southwest corner surrounding Tracy (Figure 1).²
- 🌿 From 2013 to 2016, the number of cases have tripled in San Joaquin County (Figure 2).²
- 🌿 Year 2016 was the highest on record (194 cases) for San Joaquin County (Figure 2).²
- 🌿 As of October 4, there are 128 cases reported in San Joaquin County for 2017 (Figure 2) and could surpass last year since most cases are reported in November and December.²

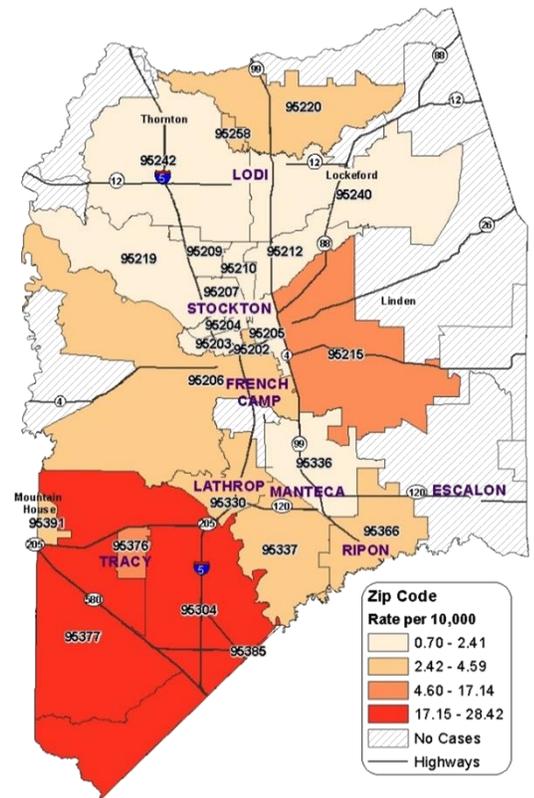
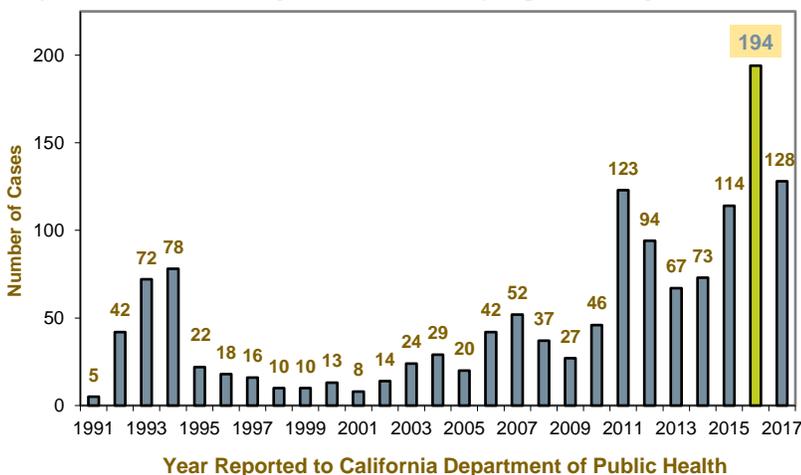


Figure 1. Coccidioidomycosis Rates by Zip Codes², San Joaquin County, 2014-2016

Figure 2. Coccidioidomycosis Cases, San Joaquin County, 1991-2017*



Notes: *Data are provisional (up-to-date as of 10/4/2017). Counts most likely will not match other reports due to differences in reporting.

Sources:

¹ Tabnak F, Knutson K, Cooksey G, Nguyen A, Vugia D, Epidemiologic Summary of Coccidioidomycosis in California, 2016. California Department of Public Health, June 2017;
² Cases: San Joaquin County, Public Health Services, Epidemiology (unpublished raw data). Accessed through AVSS and CalREDIE on 10/4/2017; Population: US Census, ACS, 2011-2015 (5-yr estimates).

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How can I reduce the risk of Valley Fever?

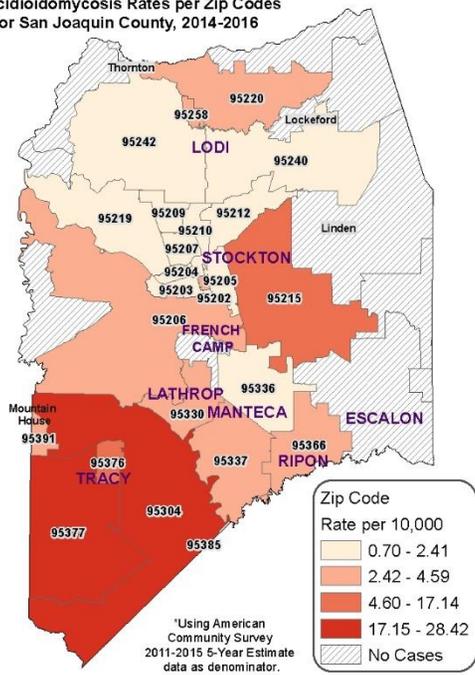
The best way to reduce the risk is to avoid breathing in dirt or dust in places where Valley Fever is common.



Photo by Christopher Taggart

Between 2013 and 2016 the number of Valley Fever cases tripled in San Joaquin County.

Coccidioidomycosis Rates per Zip Codes for San Joaquin County, 2014-2016



Keep Your Risk Low:

When it is windy and the air is dusty, especially during dust storms:

- Stay inside and keep windows and doors closed.
- While driving, keep car windows shut and use “recirculating” air conditioning if available.
- If you must be outdoors, consider wearing an N95 mask or respirator (available at drug and hardware stores).

When working or playing in areas with open dirt:

- Wet down soil before disturbing it to reduce dust.
- Consider wearing an N95 mask.

Visit the following websites for more information on Valley Fever:

<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Coccidioidomycosis.aspx>

<http://www.cdc.gov/fungal/diseases/coccidioidomycosis/index.html>

www.sjcphs.org



Oct. 2017

What you need to know about Valley Fever in San Joaquin County & California



San Joaquin County
Public Health Services
Adapted from State of California
Department of Public Health

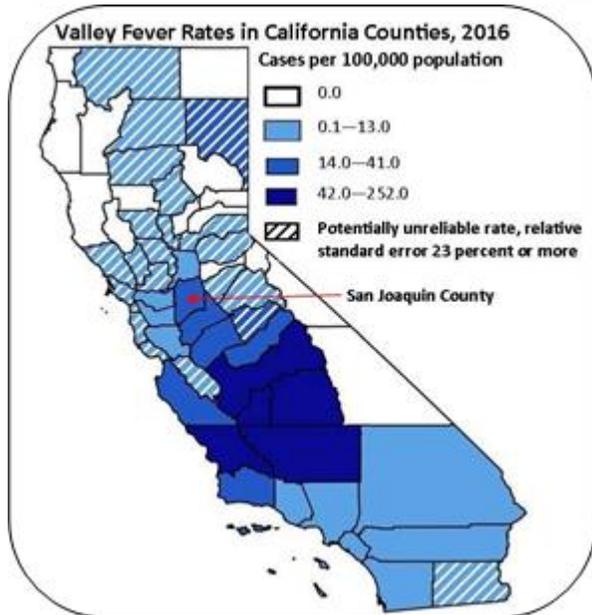
What is Valley Fever?

Valley Fever (*coccidioidomycosis* or “cocci”) is an infection caused by a fungus that lives in the soil and dirt. It can infect the lungs and cause flu-like symptoms or severe illness.

When and where do people get Valley Fever?

Valley Fever infection can occur year-round. In California, it has been reported from most counties, but especially from the San Joaquin Valley and Central Coast.

Anyone who lives in, works in, or visits a place with Valley Fever can be infected.



How do people get Valley Fever?

People can get sick by breathing in a form of the Valley Fever fungus called spores. Spores are too small to be seen. They can get into the air with dust when it is windy or when dirt is disturbed.

Valley Fever cannot be spread from one person to another.

What are the symptoms of Valley Fever?

About 60% of infected people will not get sick. People who do get sick can have symptoms that last a month or more.

- Fever
- Tiredness
- Cough
- Chest pain
- Muscle or joint aches
- Headaches
- Weight loss
- Rash

Valley Fever can also infect the brain, joints, bone, skin, or other organs. This type of infection is rare. It can be very serious and sometimes fatal.

Most people who get Valley Fever fully recover and are usually protected from getting Valley Fever again.

How is Valley Fever diagnosed and treated?

Valley Fever is diagnosed by a doctor. Your doctor can order a blood test, chest x-ray, or other tests. If you are diagnosed with Valley Fever, your doctor will determine if you need treatment with antifungal medications.

Are some people at risk for Valley Fever?

Anyone can get Valley Fever, even young and healthy people. People who disturb dirt or soil when playing or working (e.g., construction, farming, or military work) in the San Joaquin Valley and Central Coast may be at risk of infection. Some groups are at greater risk for severe Valley Fever including:

- Older adults (60 years and older)
- African Americans, Filipinos, Hispanics
- Pregnant women
- Persons with diabetes
- Persons with conditions that weaken their immune system such as: cancer, HIV, chemotherapy or steroids treatment, or organ transplant