



AmTrust North America
An AmTrust Financial Company

Safety Zone

Valley Fever

Valley Fever (*Coccidioidomycosis*) is an infection in humans caused by a fungus that lives in the soil. The fungus, *Coccidioides*, is generally present in the southwestern United States, Central America and South America. In the U.S. it is most commonly found in California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. There have also been cases in the state of Washington. It is contracted through microscopic fungal spores that become airborne when their habitat (soils that are from 2 to 12-inches deep) is disturbed. This can be triggered by digging, driving or even high winds. According to the CDC about 10,000 U.S. cases are reported each year, mostly from Arizona and California.

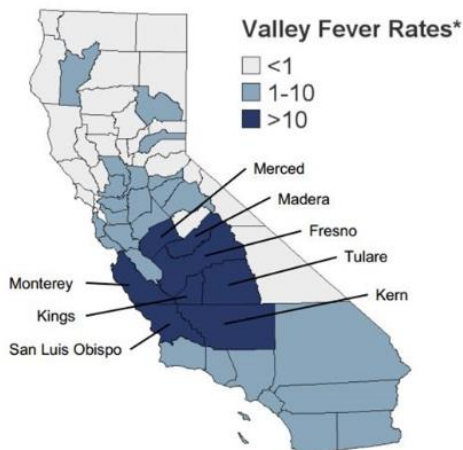
Symptoms:

- Tiredness (Fatigue)
- Cough
- Fever
- Shortness of Breath
- Headache
- Night Sweats
- Muscle Aches or Joint Pain
- Rash on Upper Body or Legs

Who is at risk?

- Those with weakened immune systems:
 - HIV/AIDS
 - Organ transplant recipients
 - Are taking medications such as Corticosteroids or TNF inhibitors
- Pregnant Women
- People with Diabetes
- People over age 60 (although anyone can contract this illness)
- People of African American or Filipino Descent

Areas with greatest incidence rates in California



*Average of annual rates from 2008-2012 per 100,000 population

Source: California Dept of Public Health

Industries with higher risk for Valley Fever:

- Agriculture
- Construction – including road building and excavation
- Archaeology
- Wildland Firefighters
- Military
- Mining, quarries, gas and oil extraction

Any work activity that disturbs soil in which spores are present can increase the risk of Valley Fever. Additionally, areas with dusty conditions and wind-blown dusts are at an increased risk.

How employers can protect employees:

1. Examine worksite and research fungal spore areas: techniques include review of specialty maps and testing soil samples
2. Minimize disturbance of soil
 - a. Maximize ground cover
 - b. Use water or soil stabilizers to reduce airborne dust
 - c. Limit driving on the jobsite to the extent possible
3. Provide and use approved respiratory protection to filter particles
 - a. NIOSH-approved respiratory protection with particulate filters rated as N95, N99, N100, P100 or HEPA. California employers must develop and implement a respiratory protection program in accordance with Cal/OSHA's Respiratory Protection standard (8 CCR 5144)
4. Quickly cover any cuts or abrasions to limit skin infections
5. Provide air-conditioned cabs for vehicles, keeping windows and vents closed
6. Suspend work during heavy winds
7. Take measures to reduce transporting spores offsite, such as:
 - a. Clean tools, equipment, and vehicles before transporting offsite
 - b. If workers' clothing is likely to be heavily contaminated with dust, provide coveralls and change rooms, and showers where possible
8. Train all personnel how to recognize the symptoms of Valley Fever

Additional information on Valley Fever can be found at these websites:

- <http://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/valley-fever-home.html>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/features/valleyfever/index.html>
- <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Coccidioidomycosis.aspx>

For additional resources on this topic and other safety and risk management subjects visit the Loss Control section on our website: <https://www.amtrustgroup.com/small-business-insurance/claims/prevention>

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