

RIGOBERTO VARGAS, MPH, DIRECTOR

ROBERT M. LEVIN, MD, HEALTH OFFICER
HOT TIPS #99 DATE 01/09/2018

Please copy and distribute to ALL physicians and First Responders at your location.

HEALTH ADVISORY

Coccidioidomycosis (Valley Fever) in Ventura County

Key Messages:

- A first responder to the Thomas Fire, and now possibly a second, has developed coccidioidomycosis (Valley Fever)
- First Responders to the Thomas Fire who present with cough and are attributing it to smoke exposure should be considered as suspects for coccidioidomycosis

Advisory:

A first responder to the Thomas Fire has developed Valley Fever (coccidioidomycosis). It usually presents as a pneumonia, occasionally with associated erythema nodosum, but in less than 0.5% of cases will present as another skin problem, a bone or joint infection, or meningitis. Risk of dissemination and severe disease is higher in those with an immune deficiency, infants, Filipinos, Hispanics, and Blacks.

Most people have no symptoms and will clear the infection on their own. Of those who become symptomatic, most have a pneumonia which improves on its own. However, some have a pneumonia which is unimproved after 2 weeks, and may require treatment. In most cases, symptoms of Valley Fever occur within a week or two after exposure, though symptoms have been known occur as long as 2 years post-exposure.

Suspect coccidioidomycosis in patients presenting with flu-like illness and/or pneumonia with fever, cough, chest pain, and headache. Be particularly suspicious if the symptoms have lasted for two weeks or more. Other complaints include fatigue, muscle aches, bone aches, and night sweats that may last for weeks to months. A helpful clinical finding is erythema nodosum which appears as red, raised bruises on the anterior shins in a minority of cases.

The organism resides in the top few inches of soil and can aerosolize with digging or cultivating the soil, with Santa Ana winds blowing up dust or following an earthquake. Soil denuded after a fire may be more likely to spread the infection. It is worth noting that there has been a significant increase in Valley Fever over the past few months over that seen in previous years both in the State and in Ventura County.

Please consider the possibility of Valley Fever, coccidioidomycosis, in any First Responder or for that matter anyone else who may have been exposed to smoke or dust from the Thomas Fire. Testing for Valley Fever should include a blood test for Cocci complement fixation

If you suspect or become aware of any cases of Cocci, please submit a CMR (Confidential Morbidity Report) and alert our Communicable Disease team at 805 981-5201.

This bulletin is intended to improve the public health in our county by keeping physicians and nurses informed of noteworthy diagnoses, disease trends and other events of medical interest. Another goal of a public health department is to educate. We hope that you will use this information to increase your awareness. Please allow us to continue in our role of speaking to the press so that we may maximize the educational message to the benefit of all citizens of Ventura County.

Communicable Disease Office

2500 South C Street, Suite B, Oxnard, California 93033 • (805) 981-5201 • FAX (805) 981-5200