



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Fungus Among Us

Coccidioidomycosis — California, 2000–2007

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[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

A recent study found that the incidence of coccidioidomycosis, often called Valley Fever, has increased substantially in parts of California. Valley Fever is an infection caused by a fungus that lives in soil.

Dr. Amy Karon is an EIS Officer with CDC, based in California, and she's joining us today by telephone to discuss the recent increase in cases of coccidioidomycosis. Welcome to the show, Amy.

[Dr. Karon] Thanks for having me, Bob.

[Dr. Gaynes] Amy, how many cases of Valley Fever occur in the United States each year?

[Dr. Karon] Well Bob, there are an estimated 150,000 new Valley Fever cases in the United States each year. And most cases occur in the southwest, including parts of California, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, New Mexico, and Texas.

[Dr. Gaynes] Why is it most common in these southwestern states?

[Dr. Karon] The fungus that causes Valley Fever grows in the southwest because those areas have low rainfall, hot summers, and moderate winters.

[Dr. Gaynes] Amy, tell us, what are the symptoms of this infection?

[Dr. Karon] Well, about 60 percent of infected people don't have any symptoms, and people with symptoms usually develop a flu-like illness with cough, fever, chest pain, and muscle aches. In rare cases, the infection can also spread outside the lungs to the brain, bone, skin, or other organs.

[Dr. Gaynes] What types of activities make people most susceptible to Valley Fever?

[Dr. Karon] Well, anyone who spent time in an area where the fungus lives is at risk for infection, but people at highest risk for infection are those participate in activities that disturb the soil or that expose them to dusty air. And those activities include construction and agricultural work, and also military field training and archeological digging.

[Dr. Gaynes] What's the treatment for this infection?

[Dr. Karon] Treatment is usually with an oral or injected anti-fungal medicine. Not everyone who's infected needs treatment, but anyone who's been in an area where the fungus lives and develops symptoms should see their doctor to determine if treatment's appropriate.

[Dr. Gaynes] What are some ways people can avoid Valley Fever?

[Dr. Karon] People should consider avoiding dusty environments in regions where the fungus grows, including avoiding unnecessary digging and staying indoors when it's very windy and dusty out. Wetting the soil before digging may also be helpful. And wearing a mask *may* be useful, but a mask's ability to prevent infection has not yet been scientifically evaluated.

[Dr. Gaynes] Amy, where can listeners get more information about Valley Fever?

[Dr. Karon] Listeners can go to the California Department of Public Health website which is www.cdph.ca.gov and type "Valley Fever" in the search box.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Amy. I've been talking today with Dr. Amy Karon, an EIS Officer with CDC, based in California, about the recent increase in cases of Valley Fever.

Remember, if you have a flu-like illness after visiting areas of the southwestern U.S., see your healthcare provider to determine if you have Valley Fever.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.