



**COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO HEALTH AGENCY
PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Fifth Valley Fever Death of 2017 Confirmed in San Luis Obispo County
*Valley Fever Cases Expected to Spike Following Rainy Winter***

San Luis Obispo — A person has recently died in San Luis Obispo County from Valley Fever, the county's fifth death this year from the disease. The County of San Luis Obispo Public Health Department reminds residents to be aware of the risk of Valley Fever in this region so they can take precautions to limit their risk of the disease. Residents who experience flu-like symptoms that do not improve after several weeks are urged to see their doctor and ask to be tested for Valley Fever if they believe they have been exposed to the disease.

"With Valley Fever, knowledge is power," said Dr. Penny Borenstein, Health Officer of the County of San Luis Obispo. "Research shows that when people are aware of Valley Fever, they are more likely to be diagnosed earlier and receive treatment if they need it. Especially after this year's wet weather, we want to remind residents and clinicians to think Valley Fever."

The fungus that causes Valley Fever, coccidioidomycosis, lives naturally in the soil. It is highly endemic in Arizona and some areas of California, including San Luis Obispo County, Monterey County and the Central Valley region. Although the fungus can live anywhere in our county, many local cases are from the dry and often windy, eastern part of the county. When this soil is disturbed—by wind, construction, or other causes—people can breathe in the spores from this fungus and develop Valley Fever.

Valley Fever is expected to spike in 2017. The number of Valley Fever cases reported to the Public Health Department in the four-month period from January 1 – April 30 of 2017 represents a significant increase over recent years:

- 2014: 14 cases
- 2015: 18 cases
- 2016: 49 cases
- 2017: 47 cases, and 11 additional cases under investigation

This year's large amount of rainfall may mean the fungus has been growing more than usual in the soil. Now that the soil is drying and wind is increasing, the spores are more likely to become airborne.

County of San Luis Obispo Health Agency

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More than 60 percent of people who become infected with Valley Fever do not experience any symptoms and do not need treatment. Around 30-40 percent of people develop sudden flu-like symptoms. Most of these people get well on their own within weeks. A small percentage—between one and five percent—will experience a much more serious form of the disease in which the infection spreads throughout the body. People who experience this serious form of Valley Fever are at risk of dying from complications of the disease and may need to take medication for the rest of their lives.

Some people are more at risk for this serious form of the disease, including people with compromised immune systems (including people with HIV/AIDS, people currently on chemotherapy, women who are pregnant, and others) and people of African and Asian-Pacific descent.

To reduce the risk of Valley Fever:

- **Limit your exposure to dust and airborne dirt.** Try to avoid areas with a lot of dust, especially on windy days. If you need to spend time in a dusty area—such as on a construction site—wear an appropriate mask and dampen the soil to prevent it from drifting into the air. During dust storms, stay inside and close your windows.
- **Tell your doctor.** If you experience flu-like symptoms for more than several weeks and suspect you have been exposed to Valley Fever, tell your doctor and ask to be tested for Valley Fever.

More information on Valley Fever in San Luis Obispo County, including incidence maps and specific recommendations for those who work outdoors, is available on the County of San Luis Obispo Public Health Department website at:

http://www.slocounty.ca.gov/health/publichealth/commdisease/Cocci_in_SLO_County.htm.

Additional information about Valley Fever is available from:

- [Kern County Valley Fever Website](#)
- [Valley Fever Center for Excellence](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\): Valley Fever](#)

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