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Traveler Information

COCCIDIOIDOMYCOSIS

INTRODUCTION

Coccidioidomycosis, also known as Valley Fever, is caused by fungi that grow in the soil. It is a growing health concern and common cause of pneumonia in endemic areas.

At least 30-60% of people living in endemic regions are exposed to coccidioidomycosis at some point during their lives. In most people the infection will go away on its own, but for those who develop severe infections or chronic pneumonia, medical treatment is necessary.

TRANSMISSION

Coccidioidomycosis is transmitted by inhaling fungal spores that are in the air after a disturbance of contaminated soil or a natural occurrence such as a dust storm or earthquake. Rarely, spores can enter the skin through cuts or abrasions.

RISK AREAS

The fungus is found in arid (dry) or semi-arid regions of the southwestern United States, northern portions of Mexico, and a few semi-arid regions of Bolivia, Paraguay, north-central Argentina, and northeastern Brazil.

More than 150,000 infections occur each year in U.S., mostly in Arizona and California. Arizona has 2 periods of high incidence: April through June (with a peak in May) and August through December (with a peak in September). The central California valley has a single dry period from May through October.

RISK FACTORS

Infections occur most often during seasonal dry periods.

Travelers to endemic areas are at increased risk if participating in activities that expose them to dust, such as construction, landscaping, mining, agriculture, archeological excavation, military maneuvers, or recreational pursuits such as dirt biking.

Persons at risk for more severe disease include the elderly, persons with compromised immunity, pregnant women, and persons of African-American or Filipino descent.

SYMPTOMS

Most infections are asymptomatic; when symptoms do appear, it is usually 1-3 weeks after exposure.

Symptoms include fever, headache, muscle aches, rash, dry cough, weight loss, and malaise; most of these symptoms will resolve on their own. Pneumonia can occur.

In rare cases, severe lung disease or infection of the central nervous system, joints, bones, or skin may occur. Very rarely, meningitis occurs, starting with a chronic headache weeks to months after the initial exposure; this type of disease is fatal.

PREVENTION

- Limit exposure to outdoor dust in endemic areas.
- Thoroughly clean any skin injuries with soap and water.
- Persons at risk for severe disease—especially immunocompromised travelers—should avoid travel to high risk areas during the dry season. If exposure is unavoidable, these persons should consider wearing an N95 respiratory mask.

NEED FOR MEDICAL ASSISTANCE

Travelers who experience symptoms that last longer than a week following dust exposure in a risk area should seek medical attention.

Travax content represents decision-relevant, expert synthesis of real-time data reconciled with new and existing available advice from authoritative national and international bodies. Recommendations may differ from those of individual countries' public health authorities.

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