



SAN BENITO COUNTY

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY

GAIL NEWEL, MD, MPH
HEALTH OFFICER

JAMES A. RYDINGSWORD
AGENCY DIRECTOR

PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES
Healthy People in Healthy Communities

Press Release

Increase in Reported Valley Fever Cases Locally and Statewide

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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CONTACT:

Sam Perez, Public Information Officer

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) has announced an increase in the number of new valley fever cases reported from local health departments in California in 2017, compared with the number of cases reported for the same period in 2016.

In San Benito County, the reported number of cases year to date is 3, up from 1 in 2016, and none in 2015. Seven confirmed cases of valley fever have been recently reported in employees working at the solar project site in Panoche, but only one of those is a resident of San Benito County.

Valley fever, also known as coccidioidomycosis, or “cocy”, is caused by the spore of a fungus that grows in soil in parts of California, Arizona, and other areas of the southwestern United States. People get infected by breathing in spores present in dust that gets into the air when it is windy or when soil is disturbed, such as through digging during construction. Solar project construction sites in San Luis Obispo and Monterey Counties had Valley Fever outbreaks among their employees in recent years.

The number of valley fever cases varies from year to year, and by season. Cases can be more common in the late summer and fall. It is unknown why there has been an apparent increase in valley fever cases in California in 2017.

“With an increase in reported Valley Fever cases, it is important that people living, working, and travelling in California are aware of its symptoms, especially in the southern San Joaquin Valley and the Central Coast, where it is most common,” said CDPH Director and State Public Health Officer Dr. Karen Smith.

A person can reduce the risk of infection by avoiding breathing in dirt or dust in areas where valley fever is common. In these areas, when it is windy outside and the air is dusty, stay inside and keep windows and doors closed. While driving, keep car windows closed and use recirculating air conditioning, if available. If you must be outdoors when it is windy and dusty, consider wearing a properly fitted mask (such as an N95 respirator mask, which is widely available in retail stores), and refrain from disturbing the soil whenever possible. Employers should train their workers about valley fever symptoms and take steps to limit workers’ exposure to dust.

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Most infected people will not show signs of illness. Those who do become ill with valley fever may have symptoms similar to other illnesses, including influenza or bacterial or viral pneumonia, so valley fever is not always recognized. The flu-like symptoms can last for two weeks or more. While most people recover fully, some people are at risk for more severe disease or complications of valley fever such as pneumonia, infection of the brain, joints, bone, skin or other organs. People with an increased risk for severe disease include those 60 years or older, pregnant women, and people with diabetes or conditions that weaken their immune system. Additionally, African-Americans and Filipinos are at increased risk for severe disease, but the reason is unknown.

“In San Benito County, anyone who develops flu-like symptoms, such as cough, fever, or difficulty breathing, lasting two weeks or more, should ask their health care provider about valley fever,” says San Benito County Health Officer, Dr. Gail Newel. “This is especially true for those working in occupations involving disruption of soil, such as farming and construction work.”

For more information visit CDPH’s Valley Fever website:

<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Coccidioidomycosis.aspx>

and the CDC’s Valley Fever website:

<http://www.cdc.gov/fungal/diseases/coccidioidomycosis/index.html>

Check on the San Benito Public Health Services website for updates: <http://hhsa.cosb.us/publichealth/>.

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Health Alert: Warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: Provides information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update: Provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.