

COCCIDIOIDOMYCOSIS (Valley Fever)

Coccidioidomycosis (Valley Fever) is a fungal infection common to the Southwestern United States. The spores are found in the dirt and dust. The disease is acquired by inhaling the spores into the airways and then into the lungs. The frequent dust storms and winds inherent to the Valley of the Sun contribute to the spread of the spores of the disease here. The dog, cat and man can become infected with Valley Fever but it is rare for it to spread from the dog to human or human to dog.

The disease has two classifications, primary and disseminated. The primary form of the disease usually involves the respiratory tract or pulmonary system (pertaining to the lungs and airway) or cutaneous (pertaining to the skin). The pulmonary form may spread or disseminate to other areas of the body causing symptoms in that particular organ.

The pulmonary form may be a mild infection with symptoms of a typical cold. Some of the most common early signs to watch for include.

- *Coughing
- *Elevated temperature 104-105 degrees
- *Swelling of joints
- * Limping
- *Skin abscesses
- * Fever
- *Weight loss
- * Lack of appetite
- *Lack of energy
- * Uveitis (eye infection)

Radiographs (x-rays) of the chest may show haziness in the lungs giving clues that Valley Fever may be the cause of the cough. If the primary form of the disease does not resolve, infection may continue to develop in two ways. First, disease may remain localized as a lung disease and the lung may heal but remain damaged due to scarring or mineralization. Secondly, the disease may disseminate to other body areas. Bones, joints, nervous system, kidney and liver are common sites. Any organ may be involved if the disease spreads. If bones become involved, there may be pain and swelling around the effected bone. The joints may also swell. The pet may develop a fever or have seizure if the nervous system becomes affected.

The cutaneous form of the disease is uncommon. A skin lesion is relatively a firm, hard, mass with a central ulcerated area. The lymph nodes often will become enlarge in the area of the lesion. These areas often drain and are a source of infection for people. Do not touch these areas without having your veterinarian examine your pet.

Valley Fever can be suspected based on clinical signs, but diagnosis involves specific blood test and possibly X-rays to determine if your pet has the disease and how advanced it may be. Treatment of Valley Fever is not a simple matter as it involves long term therapy with close monitoring. There is no effective prevention against Valley fever. The best chance for treatment is early detection. Treatment may need to be continued for several months or years. Please do not stop any medications prior to consulting with your veterinarian. If you should have any further questions concerning Valley Fever, please consult your veterinarian.