Valley Fever
(Coccidioidomycosis)

Fact Sheet
for Archeologists

Where Valley Fever is Found in the United States
(i.e. Endemic Areas)
The Coccidioides fungus lives in soil and is endemic to California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Nevada, and Utah. It is mainly found in the Lower Sonoran Life Zone (i.e. low elevation desert), although Valley fever outbreaks have occurred in other arid or semi-arid settings. Typical Coccidioides habitat is fine, sandy loam soil. Since the 1950s, at least five outbreaks have been reported among archeologists, including an outbreak at Dinosaur National Monument in Utah in 2001.

Susceptible Population
People from non-endemic areas who lack prior exposure to Coccidioides are at increased risk for infection. Previously exposed individuals develop immunity to Coccidioides spores and are usually protected from subsequent infection.

This brochure was developed by the NPS Office of Public Health and is available at:
http://www.nps.gov/public_health/info/factsheets/fs_valleyfever.htm

For more information on Valley fever:
http://www.cdc.gov/fungal/coccidioidomycosis

For information on other archeology health and safety hazards:

NPS Office of Public Health Contacts
Director: (202) 513-7217
Epidemiologist: (202) 538-9969

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Prevention
Safety precautions are recommended for archeologists and other high-risk occupations. These precautions are based on common sense and have not been scientifically studied. No vaccine is currently available. Commonly recommended prevention measures include:

- Educate everybody working at archeological dig sites in endemic areas about Valley fever
- Control dust, where possible, by wetting soil, working upwind, and/or wearing a fit-tested N95 or greater respirator (one that is personally fitted and filters 95% of airborne particles)
- Minimize use of blowers and maintain safe rules for their use (i.e. don’t blow dust toward others)
- Exercise additional caution when digging near animal burrows or Native American pre-historic sites
- Wash field clothes and disinfect equipment promptly as spores can survive on surfaces. Wear an N95 respirator when cleaning dusty artifacts in the laboratory
- Before starting field activities, ask participants where they have lived or traveled and if they have health concerns. If individuals are from non-endemic areas or are at risk for complications, limit their exposure to dusty conditions
- Seek healthcare promptly if you become ill, inform your provider about potential exposures, and ask to be tested for Valley fever