

VALLEY FEVER

Valley fever, also called *Coccidioidomycosis immitis*, is a fungal disease that commonly affects people and dogs living in the southwestern United States and northwestern Mexico. The fungal spores of the valley fever organism are released into the air when the ground is disturbed by construction, farming and after rainfall. The spores are inhaled and lodge in the lungs where the infection begins. Mammalian infection is most likely to occur in the summer months when hot, dry conditions favor inhalation of arthroconidia spread by wind or by physical disturbance of infected soil. Clinical signs of infection may not appear for weeks following infection.

The average age of dogs becoming infected with valley fever is 1.5 to 4 years, although younger or older dogs may also contract the disease. Males are more likely to become infected than females. Sporting breeds may have a slightly increased risk of developing the disease.

Valley fever can affect many organ systems but most commonly involves the lungs, bones or eyes. Dogs with the lung form of valley fever often exhibit a dry, hacking cough, moderate lethargy, decreased appetite, increased drinking and, perhaps, a mild fever. The bone form typically causes bone pain or swelling manifested by limping, if the involved bone is in a leg. The eye form can lead to vision problems and changes in the appearance of the eye. Occasionally, other more severe symptoms will be observed. **Sometimes there are no symptoms even though the animal has the disease.**

Your veterinarian can diagnose valley fever by analyzing a blood sample. Treatment of valley fever usually requires twice-daily administration of an oral medication. Fluconazole is the drug of choice. This drug is quite expensive and treatment is prolonged, ranging from 3 months in the early-detected lung infection, to a year or more in an advanced bone infection. Typical costs to treat a 70-lb. dog may average \$2.00 per day. Once the disease is in remission, low-dose maintenance may be required indefinitely for some dogs. Vitamin C must also be given in order to aid absorption of the medication. Using milk thistle is also recommended, and some have found that the addition of sulfa increases the effectiveness of the drug. Untreated animals will usually die from complications caused by this disease.

Two weeks after starting a treatment regimen, the doctor should check a blood sample 2 to 4 hours after your dog has received a pill to make sure the correct dosage has been selected. Thereafter, the dog should be tested every 3 months.

A dog infected with valley fever is not contagious to people or other animals under most circumstances. However, valley fever can potentially spread to other dogs or people if a draining skin lesion, caused by an underlying bone infection, accumulates under a bandage or dries on the coat for several days. The transmission of the disease in this way is a very rare occurrence.

Further information can be obtained online from the Valley Fever Center For Excellence website: <http://www.vfce.arizona.edu/>



This information is provided courtesy of **Arizona Golden Rescue**. AGR recommends having your dog tested for valley fever at least annually, even if the dog is exhibiting no symptoms. You can contact us by phone (623-566-9247) by e-mail (info@arizonagoldenrescue.org) or through our Website (www.arizonagoldenrescue.org).