**Valley Fever Center for Excellence Promotes Awareness of Disease that Affects Tens of Thousands of Arizonans**

*A recent survey shows a significant number of insurance providers cover diagnostic lab tests for Valley fever, according to researchers.*

Researchers at the University of Arizona College of Medicine – Tucson’s [Valley Fever Center for Excellence](https://vfce.arizona.edu/) are offering educational resources to patients and providers during Valley Fever Awareness Week, Nov. 13-21. The disease, which features flu-like symptoms, affects approximately 150,000 people a year, mostly in Arizona.

“Each year, thousands of people move to Arizona from places where Valley fever doesn’t exist, and they have no knowledge of the disease,” said [**John Galgiani, MD**](https://vfce.arizona.edu/profile/john-galgiani-md), director of the Valley Fever Center for Excellence, professor of medicine and member of the BIO5 Institute. “They don’t know what causes it, what the symptoms look like, or when and how to get tested for it.”

Even people who have lived in Arizona their entire lives, including doctors, may be unfamiliar with the disease, Galgiani said. People with Valley fever often are misdiagnosed and prescribed medications that are ineffective against Valley fever. That delay in care may result in someone developing a more serious and potentially deadly infection that might have been avoided with earlier intervention.

The good news is a significant number of insurance providers that serve Arizona cover the cost of Valley fever diagnostic tests, according to a recent survey by [**Amy Grizzle, PharmD**](https://www.pharmacy.arizona.edu/directory/profile/amy-grizzle-pharmd), associate director of the Center for Health Outcomes and PharmacoEconomic Research in the UArizona R. Ken Coit College of Pharmacy.

Dr. Grizzle and her students – UArizona student Brittanie Hoang and R. Ken Coit College of Pharmacy students Chloe Grace Rose, Joshua Kessler, and Jennifer Weisbrod – found 15 insurance providers in Arizona confirmed they cover test costs if ordered in a primary care or urgent care setting. Eleven of those indicated the test would be covered without prior authorization.

“If the cost of the test is covered by insurance, I believe more tests are likely to get done, and with more accurate diagnoses, effective treatment can begin sooner,” Dr. Galgiani said.

It is estimated that 43% of Valley fever cases take longer than a month to be correctly diagnosed.

“Many people with acute symptoms of fever, fatigue, cough, shortness of breath, muscle aches or joint pain will go to an urgent care or primary care clinic. Because the symptoms are so similar to flu, bacterial pneumonia or COVID-19, they may be misdiagnosed,” Dr. Galgiani said. “We want patients to know they should ask their doctors about getting tested for Valley fever. It’s a simple blood test and there’s really no risk or harm in getting it done and making sure an accurate diagnosis is made.”

Valley fever, also known as coccidioidomycosis, is primarily a disease of the lungs caused by the inhalation of airborne particles of the fungus *Coccidioides*, which is found in the southwestern U.S. and northwestern Mexico.

While half of the people who get Valley fever remain asymptomatic, others will experience a weeks- to months-long respiratory illness that annually affects approximately 1% of the population in Arizona and central California. Ten percent of every 100,000 patients will develop complications that can result in long-term treatment and medical care, permanent disability or death. The disease has an economic impact of nearly $1.5 billion in California and Arizona each year.

There is currently no cure or vaccine for Valley fever, but antifungal medications can help keep the more serious complications at bay. A recent study led by Valley Fever Center for Excellence researchers tested a potential canine vaccine that was shown to be effective in [preventing the disease in dogs](https://healthsciences.arizona.edu/newsroom/news-releases/2021/study-shows-vaccine-protects-dogs-against-valley-fever). A successful canine vaccine could lead to the development of a vaccine for humans.

For more information, visit the Valley Fever Center for Excellence [website](https://vfce.arizona.edu/) or [Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/ValleyFeverCenterArizona/?__xts__%5B0%5D=68.ARDDoHbZTX4g1wWoYN2uSvrHHI2VkTk-HJ9yIxNrrCw4q2Z_9M43UNBvUHeqhlVpxYmETZJ0EcdxNKxnDuZZGl8xECpiyLYE3Gq8-BOQTrBgxxuq63iByGMLx5xshTexhn2RS1FZNdACjS8O0f0tijoPTPhu8s75csjWoANSklQtNGoCVLsBwHU3rFKtRTdMiRPD5mEoiblUheBuc03s5nhQdLNCV0VjkAZR1nzXGyw93hM8_l4FQhOejaSBpGuSvN9ltwot7oK9byJAiaLLWjB8pI1uCKaybKOg3NPxF2E2ZvD9n7TrDc0YtCWb8dw&__xts__%5B1%5D=68.ARBhzjUYJqe8_Np1V_mlltTHwQyf5oUWKxe30_0rHqnjyuPBVphkeGGW0mmNvn1f17ets5Vv3j8W6nQGZpE05QaPjty_6QeUO3EO_bmWZTh0FWlm0fH6BTI-_ACXtL1XtNJWpekpteg2yw7rp2p4EzpeljjdR30emLuSoHSnYCMrSD-Gpew0_idEB9QnoLeEQt24IKmR26CEi7t7T4cpx0g_RCF6qjiJWSbXkgZ23Yad-UjQpFq853JQ-CH4SodXahXWnOKFsrfVrmOAht4KRyzqxiiZE32uFq3tHCMg9xMfHdrGVk0pMQ&hc_ref=ARRsGddUQ8VBUJlPMZwWcSr7sNIWF2yF2t2X2CYVSlBkd-i4xBhTnuKTy91_3ezyPYM&fref=nf&__tn__=kC-R).