

Director's Message

Valley Fever Center for Excellence

December 2023

Welcome to the Valley Fever Center for Excellence website. Here we try to provide reliable and timely information about coccidioidomycosis, the medical name for Valley fever.

November 3-10, 2023, was the 20th Annual Valley Fever Awareness Week, originally conceived by the Center, subsequently sponsored jointly with the Arizona Department of Health Services, and for many years recognized by Arizona state governors. This year, a very important highlight was the Western Regional Valley Fever Workshop, held November 3 all afternoon at the UArizona College of Medicine – Phoenix and online.

The workshop was commissioned by Michael Dake, MD, UArizona senior vice-president of Health Sciences, because of the projected expansion of the endemic footprint of *Coccidioides*, the fungus that causes Valley fever, across much of the western United States. It began with a plenary lecture by Tom Monath, MD who reviewed how vaccines have helped in many ways to improve public health. He emphasized that they have been valuable for many regional diseases as well as for world-wide problems.

Morgan Gorris, PhD gave the next presentation, describing why Valley fever might spread to new regions of the west, as far north as the Canadian border. Third, Bridget Barker, PhD summarized work now underway by groups from all three Arizona universities to better understand the ecology of *Coccidioides* in its current endemic habitat. This work has been made possible with funds provided in 2022 by the Arizona Board of Regents. The next two presentations described current work to develop preventative vaccines for Valley fever. I updated the progress with the UArizona-discovered vaccine, currently in advanced development by Anivive Lifesciences, to protect dogs and the prospects for it to continue its development towards a human vaccine. Then, Deborah Fuller, PhD of the University of Washington explained how she and colleagues at Northern Arizona University hope to create a Valley fever vaccine as



an extension of the breakthrough developments in nucleic acid vaccines for COVID-19. Finally, George Thompson, MD of the University of California at Davis and Monica Gandhi, MD of the University of California at San Francisco discussed other ways to mitigate the growing Valley fever problem. After these seven presentations, a discussion was conducted that involved several panelists who added their perspectives of how policy choices might help to manage Valley fever. There were 201 registrants, 86 in-person and 115 online. Fortunately, the workshop was recorded and can be accessed [here](#).

I think this workshop reflects the growing concern about Valley fever, both as a significant public health problem today and the possibility that it might expand considerably in the future. This past year has seen major news stories about the risk of Valley fever in the Wall Street Journal, the Washington Post, Fortune Magazine, USA Today, the New York Times, Vox, Scientific American, the Los Angeles Times, People Magazine, Wired, the Hill, the Atlantic Magazine, Grist, and even Rolling Stone. It has also been featured on NBC nightly news and CBS news. California has added Valley fever as one of the human health metrics that it tracks regarding the impact of climate change. On September 12 of this year, the Congressional Valley Fever Task Force held a meeting in the nation's capital to discuss how a preventative vaccine could help control Valley fever and what policy measures might be taken to facilitate vaccine development.

The Valley Fever Center for Excellence fosters education, research and best clinical practices. The greater awareness emerging now about this disease is what the Center has been advocating for more than a quarter century. Last month, the University of Arizona Foundation launched "[Fuel Wonder](#)," an ambitious \$3 billion fundraising campaign. As part of this, the College of Medicine – Tucson has included the Valley Fever Center for Excellence as one of its three priority needs. Support for the Center could not come at a more opportune time.

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