



COCCIDIOIDOMYCOSIS (Valley Fever)

What is Coccidioidomycosis?

Coccidioidomycosis (Valley Fever) is a fungal infection common in the southwestern United States. The spores are found in the dirt and dust. This 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 this disease. The dog, cat, and man can become infected with Valley Fever, but it is rare for it to spread from the dog to the human or from the human to the dog.

The disease has two classifications, primary or disseminated. The primary form of the disease usually involves the respiratory tract or pulmonary system (the lungs and airways) or cutaneous (the skin). The pulmonary form may spread or disseminate to other areas of the body causing symptoms relating to that particular organ. The pulmonary form of coccidioidomycosis may be a mild infection with symptoms typical of a common cold. Coughing and exercise intolerance are common along with a lack of appetite. 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, the infection may continue to develop in two ways. First, the 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.

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

The early symptoms of Valley Fever include: a dry, nonproductive cough, difficulty breathing, lack of appetite, and weight loss. If bones become involved, there may be pain and swelling around the affected bone. The joints may also swell. The pet may also develop a fever or have seizures if the nervous system becomes affected.

How is it Diagnosed?

Coccidioidomycosis can be suspected based on clinical signs and radiographs but special blood tests are usually done to confirm the disease. The tests usually take several days to obtain results.

How is it Treated?

Treatment is variable according to the signs present in the pet and may consist of antibiotics for secondary bacterial infections, intravenous fluids, antifungal drugs, oxygen therapy if the lungs are severely affected, and other supportive care. Treatment may need to be continued for several months or years. Some pets will succumb to the effects of the disease with time even with long-term, aggressive care. Typically the treatment consists of giving an antifungal agent. Ketoconazole is best given twice daily with food. A small dose of vitamin C given with each dose helps to improve absorption. Fluconazole and Itraconazole do not require vitamin C with them. The treatment period will vary from as little as three months to years. Blood tests should be repeated every three months and treatment continued until the antibody titers indicate the disease is no longer active.

If you should have any further questions concerning Valley Fever, please consult us. Call Us If...

- Your pet loses its appetite or seems lethargic or uncomfortable.
- Or if it vomits after taking its medicine.

Thank you for this opportunity to serve you!