

# Inhaling of Infected Dust Cause of Lung Fungus

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County Health Officer

Coccidioidomycosis is a disease that generally occurs in the lungs following inhalation of, and infection by, the fungus *Coccidioides immitis*. Infection through open wounds is possible but uncommon.

Thus far in 1961, some 25 cases of the disease have been reported in Los Angeles County contrasted with 32 cases during the same period in 1960. Most of these cases occurred in the Newhall-San Fernando areas of the county.

The spores of this fungus are found in the soil of arid or semiarid areas in many parts

of the world, including sections of Southern California and particularly in the southern part of the San Joaquin Valley. In fact, the disease is sometimes called San Joaquin Valley Fever since at one time the fungus infection of the soil was mistakenly thought to be limited to that area.

IT HAS BEEN determined that endemic or infected areas also exist in western Texas, southern and central Arizona, and the southern parts of New Mexico, Utah, and Nevada. Infected soil is also found in Mexico, Central and South

America, and in other parts of the world as well.

Cases of the disease, contracted by travelers passing through endemic areas, have been identified almost everywhere in the United States. The infection is not contagious and hence does not pass from one person to another or from animal to man.

Coccidioidomycosis may affect anyone at any age, although more than half the cases occur between ages of 15 and 25. Men are infected five times more frequently than women, and dark-skinned individuals 10 times more often

than persons with fair skin.

THE INVISIBLE spores (seeds) of the fungus gain entry into the body when they are inhaled with the infected dust or dirt that is blown about by the wind. Nearly every resident of endemic areas has had the infection at some time or other, but it is estimated that about 60 per cent of these individuals are never aware of it since the infection does not occasion any symptoms of illness whatsoever.

In about 10 days to three weeks following infection, near-

ly 40 per cent of individuals develop symptoms of illness common to influenza, pneumonia, or even tuberculosis.

Approximately five per cent of these cases also develop skin lesions. This primary form of the disease generally clears up in a few days or weeks without leaving any perceptible trace of its occurrence. Yet, in a few cases, the illness may persist for several months and cause lung changes that are visible on a chest X-ray film.

About one out of every 200 cases of primary infection that occurs, however, develops into an acute and progressive form of illness that is highly fatal. In these cases of disseminated coccidioidomycosis, a b c e s e s

may spread throughout the body and involve the bones, meninges, skin and other organs.

WHILE NO medication yet tried has been consistently successful in the treatment of the infection, rest and proper nutrition are extremely important in preventing the progress of the disease into its more severe forms. For this reason, medical aid should be obtained whenever the disease is suspected. A simple skin test will reveal exposure to the infection, and additional laboratory tests will confirm whether or not the disease is presently active. Studies have revealed that

dust storms in endemic areas usually precede an outbreak of the disease, and also that dust control may reduce the infection by as much as 55 per cent. Such control measures are important in the suppression of coccidioidomycosis and should be done whenever practicable.

Fortunately, most cases of the infection are not at all serious, and even the lightest infection confers a lifelong immunity to the disease. But prompt medical care in known cases of coccidioidomycosis may prevent the infection from developing into a serious or fatal illness.

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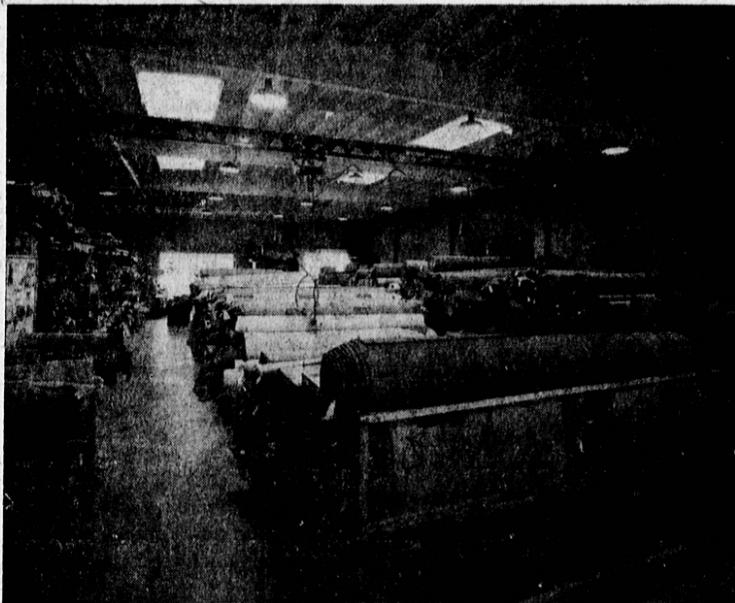
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