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UC Merced, UCSF Fresno and Fresno State Join Forces to Address Valley Fever
An upcoming forum will generate more discussion about the disease and aid in developing a plan to improve healthcare, research and community interventions

MERCED, Calif. — Seeking to combat a debilitating and sometimes fatal disease commonly found in the San Joaquin Valley, three regional institutions are uniting to improve the area's health.

The University of California, Merced, Health Sciences Research Institute, University of California, San Francisco Fresno Medical Education Program and the California State University, Fresno Central California Center for Health and Human Services are working together to determine research priorities and public service needs to address valley fever.

The campuses will hold “Valley Fever Research Day” from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 9, at the UCSF Fresno Center for Medical Education and Research, 155 N. Fresno St., Fresno.

Quick Facts
- Three San Joaquin Valley institutions are uniting to determine research priorities and public service needs for valley fever.
- A forum open to the public will be held Nov. 9 in Fresno.
- Researchers estimate that each year as many as 150,000 people are infected by Coccioidioides, the fungus that causes valley fever.
The forum, funded in part by Sierra Health Foundation and Kaiser Permanente, is intended to facilitate a conversation that informs and guides valley fever research in the San Joaquin Valley with the goal of improving detection, prevention and treatment of the illness. The conversation includes community members and organizations, civic leaders, academics, clinical researchers, healthcare and public health professionals and others interested in addressing valley fever.

“Community input is very important for this conversation,” said Paul Brown, a UC Merced professor and director of the Health Sciences Research Institute. “The voices of businesses, public agencies and community organizations that serve or work with people who may be at risk for valley fever are needed to make sure that the most appropriate research is available to serve the San Joaquin Valley and California.”

The forum is free and open to the public. Attendees can register online and contact Erin Gaab at 209-228-4803 or egaab@ucmerced.edu for more information.

Presentations from researchers, clinicians, advocates and community members will spark discussions and lead to a plan to improve healthcare, research and community interventions. This forum represents the first step in an action plan being developed by a consortium that includes UC Merced, UCSF Fresno, Fresno State, Community Medical Centers, Children’s Hospital Central California, the public health departments in the eight counties that make up the San Joaquin Valley and community organizations serving or working with people most at risk for valley fever.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, researchers estimate that each year as many as 150,000 people are infected by Coccidioides, the fungus that causes valley fever. Infection occurs when fungal spores, which are not directly visible, are inhaled. Most people who are infected do not show symptoms, but some people may experience flu-like symptoms that last from weeks to months. Severe cases can even result in death. The fungus is commonly found in the Southwest, particularly Arizona and California, including the San Joaquin Valley.

Because valley fever is a rare disease outside the Southwest, it does not attract sufficient research funding. More than 40 percent of people infected with valley fever have symptoms. Many of those infected with valley fever are sick without knowing why or without being diagnosed.
UC Merced opened Sept. 5, 2005, as the 10th campus in the University of California system and the first American research university of the 21st century. Situated near Yosemite National Park, the campus significantly expands access to the UC system for students throughout the state, with a special mission to increase college-going rates among students in the San Joaquin Valley. It also serves as a major base of advanced research, a model of sustainable design and construction, and a stimulus to economic growth and diversification throughout the region.