

" **VALLEY FEVER**
Saturday
January 24, 2015

For those who don't live anywhere near the West Coast, specifically, the Central Valley of California, there's a fungus in the soil commonly referred to as "Valley Fever." Basically, it's a spore, and when the wind blows, there's a possibility of that spore being carried along with the wind, and eventually, inhaled by people, where it goes on to infect the lungs. For most of us, the symptoms mirror a cold or flu, not lasting very long at all. Once you've become infected, you're immune to it, or so we've been told by the medical personnel here at the prison. However, there are many people that such an infection can pose serious, potentially deadly, risks. Such groups of people usually involve those with seriously compromised immune systems (HIV+ with a low CD-4 count, cancer patients, Hepatitis C patients on medication, etc.), people with diabetes, blacks and Phillipinos. For them, the infection spreads beyond the lungs, to other organs, putting them at greater risks. Since these spores are in a limited part of the country, causing complications for a limited number of people, people who may be seen by some as "undesirable," pharmaceutical companies haven't devoted much time or money to finding a vaccine or treatment.

Like most threats, there are things that can be done to minimize, or maximize, the risk of exposure. As the spores causing Valley Fever live in the soil and are spread by the wind, this means that one of two things: either stop the wind from blowing (a physical impossibility if there ever was one), or work to make the soil more difficult to be picked up and carried when the wind does blow, as it inevitably will. The latter is done by planting grass or some other organic matter. Now, when the wind blows, the grass holds most, if not all of it, in place. Likewise, watering the grass when you know the wind's going to be relatively high also helps, as moist earth is far more difficult to be blown around than dry dirt or dust.

However, you can maximize your Valley Fever risks just as well as you can minimize them. To maximize the risk, do things that disturb the soil, particularly after a heavy rain, like digging it up or doing major construction. The heavy rain causes the spores to rapidly reproduce, preparing them for release once the soil's dried out, and the digging and construction breaks up the soil, getting deep into the earth to free even more of the spores, causing them to spread faster and farther than they naturally would have.

As an inmate in a state penal facility, our risks for exposure are probably exponentially higher. For starters, prisons are traditionally built in some of the most remote areas imaginable in an attempt to isolate us even further from society and to make all that much more difficult to get away were we to break out. It makes perfect sense when you stop and think of it, but that carries with it a risk. After all, there's a reason that area's so remote. On September 21, 2006, I was transferred out of Corcoran and to the California Men's Colony (CMC) East Facility because Corcoran had been determined to be in the "Valley Fever Epidemic Area," and all of those determined to be at high risk were moved out for "medical concerns." When I arrived at the CMC, I seen notices up on the bulletin boards warning about Valley Fever being in the soil, and I immediately inquired about it. I was reassured, over and over, that the notices were just put up because they were mandatory at all prisons, not because there was actually Valley Fever here at the CMC. A few years later, the prison stopped watering the grass, and concerned, I filed an inmate appeal, seeking to have the grass watered, because grass prevents Valley Fever from being spread when the wind blows. I was once again told that there was no Valley Fever in the soil, that the prison knew this to be a fact because they'd tested for it. I was also threatened with a transfer if I persisted with my attempts to water the grass, but I could have cared less about a transfer than. In fact, I welcomed a transfer, which is probably why they just gave up.

Here I am, more than 8 years after I was transferred to this prison. I finally got a job as in the California Prison Industry Authority (CALPIA, or PIA). In addition to having one of the best jobs possible in a prison setting, working with employers who treat me like a human and respect me as a person, I've also been placed into a situation that not only utilizes my technical skills, but also works to expand my skillset in a way that's actually going to be beneficial to me upon my release, not just from a labor standpoint, but from an educational standpoint as well. Now that I've finally worked all of this into my rehabilitative program, I'm being told that there is indeed Valley Fever in the soil, and that I, along with hundreds of other people here, are going to be uprooted once again and shipped to another prison in the state, where I'll have to start all over. This not only sets my rehabilitation back, it also ensures that I won't be able to leave the state upon my release, returning to my home state of Ohio because of a little known law that says that your court fines have to be paid off, in full, before you can parole out of state. I would have met this condition if, and only if, I could have stayed at my current job, and maximum pay, from now until the time I was paroled.

Neither I, nor anyone else, know where we're going or when, just that we're going to be affected. There's a rumor on the yard that this may have been delayed, at least temporarily, but we're hoping for a more permanent solution. For many of us, a transfer is completely out of the question. For starters, why transfer us? We've been here for years. If we were going to be infected, than certainly that would have happened long ago, but just as important is what happens to whites and Mexicans who are transferred to another prison from the CMC: they're beaten, over and over, sometimes even killed, because of the simple fact that they came from the CMC.

For those who aren't familiar with the reasoning behind this, the CMC had, at one point-in-time, a history of being the place where Judges, lawyers, police officers, snitches, and whatnot were sent to do their time. To get here, not only did you have to fall into this category, you also had to be a model inmate, and those who fell into one of these categories desperately wanted to get here because it meant a "nicer" place to serve their time, and without the need to enter Protective Custody (PC). Prison politics being what they were, word quickly spread, and hits were put out on anyone coming from the CMC, particularly whites and Mexicans (blacks really didn't care as much as whites and Mexican gangs).

Over time, the CMC began to take on more medical and mental health inmates, but the stigma has stayed with it, and to this day there's a very firm rule: if you're white or Mexican and you find yourself transferred to the CMC, you have 3 days to go to the hole because you beat the hell out of someone. That's the **only** way you'll be accepted on the yard at another prison should you find yourself transferred from the CMC.

With that said, many of us didn't want to play the "prison politics." When we were transferred here, we chose to "program," or follow the rules and regulations, to take our rehabilitation seriously and generally do everything within our power to maximize our chances for success upon our release back into society. And now we're being told that we're going to be transferred, against our will, to prisons in which our safety, even our lives, are going to be at risk, where there's a "green light," or standing order to take us out on sight because of where we're being transferred from.

If Valley Fever was here all along, then why were we sent here in the first place? Why did they continue telling everyone that they'd tested the soil and that Valley Fever wasn't present? After being here for more than 8-years, what does it matter now? If I was going to get it, I would have already gotten it. Of course, as far as we know, we've already been infected and become immune to it, but we'll never know because, while they shut down the entire prison system to offer immunity testing to everyone, they refused to allow those of us at "high risk" to participate, something that has all of the conspiracy theorists in here going nuts.

Shawn L. Perrot CDCR# V-42461
CMC-East Cell# 6326
P.O. Box 8101
San Luis Obispo, CA. 93409-8101

shawnlperrot@hotmail.com