

Drought conditions can spread Valley fever

By Sammy Caiola, Sacramento Bee

Don Hopkins, a former Davis police officer and professional ballroom dancer, is having some trouble staying on his feet.

Hopkins, 67, is still physically drained from an early May trip to Mercy Hospital at Folsom, where doctors pumped him with pneumonia antibiotics for more than a week before accurately diagnosing his Valley fever.

As Hopkins' temperature soared and he began to hallucinate, his wife, Lizette, insisted the doctors test for the disease, which is historically more prevalent in the southern Central Valley. Though Hopkins' test results would surprise many in the Sacramento region, experts say the fever is not constrained to the south state and can be carried to other regions via travelers and drought conditions.

"When doctors see somebody with what they think is pneumonia, they immediately give them antibiotic," said Hopkins, who lives in the El Dorado County foothills. "Often the patient gets worse and the doctors don't think about Valley fever. It can basically disable a person for the rest of their life."

Valley fever is caused by a species of fungus called *coccidioides*, which lives in the soil in Southern California, Arizona, Mexico and parts of Central America and can be brought to the surface by construction, agricultural work and other activities that disrupt the terrain, said Dr. George Thompson, director of the Coccidioidomycosis Serology Lab at the UC Davis Medical Center.

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