

Coccidioidomycosis among Prison Inmates, California, USA, 2011

[Announcer] *This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*

[Sarah Gregory] In California, coccidioidomycosis, also known as cocci, is a disease acquired by inhaling spores of *Coccidioides immitis*, a fungus found in certain arid regions, including the San Joaquin Valley in California, where 8 state prisons are located. During 2011, cocci rates at two of the prisons that consistently report more than 80 percent of California's inmate cases were reviewed. Inmate risk factors for primary, severe, and disseminated cocci were determined. Inmates of African American ethnicity who were 40 years of age and older were at significantly higher risk for primary cocci than their white counterparts. Diabetes was a risk factor for severe pulmonary cocci, and African American ethnicity a risk factor for disseminated disease. These findings contributed to a court decision mandating exclusion of African American inmates and inmates with diabetes from the two California prisons with the highest rates of cocci.

Dr. Wheeler has authored an article about cocci among prison inmates in California. She's with us today to talk about these important finding.

Dr. Wheeler, why was it important to do this study?

[Charlotte Wheeler] Well, in 2006 a federal court ruled that medical care in California's prisons violated the 8th amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The court established a Receivership to oversee the restoration of medically necessary care for California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, or CDCR, inmates. The authors of this study are currently employed by the federal Receiver under the California Correctional Health Care Services, or CCHCS, and we are part of the Public Health Branch that is in charge of preventing diseases and conditions of public health importance. Cocci is one of these diseases, and it is a condition that has presented a particularly daunting challenge to both community and correctional public health. Since this disease is contracted by inhaling fungal spores that are carried invisibly in the air, and since the disease is not spread person-to-person, the public health community, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, has been able to offer very little guidance on preventing cocci.

It was important for us to do this study because we were aware that California inmates, particularly those housed at two facilities in the San Joaquin Valley, were developing cocci at very high rates. To be able to reduce morbidity and mortality, we first needed to quantify the rates of disease and to determine if any demographic or other risk factors were associated with developing cocci or with progression of the disease to its most severe forms. We then used the study findings to ensure that the most vulnerable of our inmates were not housed at the two prisons with the highest rates of disease.

[Sarah Gregory] What would you like people to know about the problem of cocci in prisons?

[Charlotte Wheeler] We would like people to know that housing inmates in prisons where *Coccidioides* is endemic presents a challenge for California and for other prison systems in the United States. This is especially true when prisons are determined to be in areas where the rates

of disease are extremely high. CCHCS is now working with CDCR to take further steps to reduce the burden of cocci in California prisons. We are conducting voluntary cocci skin testing to determine the immune status of our inmates. Those who are non-immune will be excluded from the two prisons with the highest rates of disease.

[Sarah Gregory] I'm Sarah Gregory, for *Emerging Infectious Diseases*. You can read the entire January 2015 article, Rates and Risk Factors for Coccidioidomycosis among Prison Inmates, California, USA, 2011, online at cdc.gov/eid.

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