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Dept. of Health Releases the Results of Survey of New Mexico Clinicians' Knowledge of Valley Fever Diagnosis and Treatment

(Santa Fe) – The New Mexico Department of Health (DOH) has released new survey results about how familiar New Mexico clinicians are with the diagnosis and treatment of Coccidioidomycosis, also known as Valley Fever. Valley Fever is a disease that is contracted through the inhalation of the fungal spores that are found in the desert and semi-arid soils in parts of the southwestern United States.

In 2009, more than 10,000 cases were reported in Arizona and 2,400 cases were reported in Southern California while New Mexico reports less than 60 cases per year. In order to assess the burden of disease in New Mexico, DOH first created an online survey to assess New Mexican physicians', physician assistants', and nurse practitioners' knowledge, attitudes and practices regarding Valley Fever. DOH also has embarked on an educational campaign with clinical providers to remind them to think of Valley Fever when they are assessing their patients and to test for the disease.

Valley Fever is most common in its pulmonary form and its symptoms are similar to those of influenza. However in severe cases, pneumonia can develop and at times the fungus can invade other parts of the body and cause chronic problems.

“We know Valley Fever disease does not stop at our border with Arizona. Determining the true level of Valley Fever infections in New Mexico will help us better protect the public's health and will assist clinicians in the management of their ill patients,” said DOH Cabinet Secretary, Dr. Catherine Torres.

According to the survey results:

- While over half of respondents (57 percent) agree that Valley Fever is a problem in New Mexico just 28 percent of survey respondents felt comfortable in their ability to diagnose, and only 30 percent felt comfortable in their ability to actually treat the disease.



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- Of responding clinicians, 69 percent do not consider Valley Fever as a possible diagnosis when they have a patient presenting with respiratory disease and 91 percent reported not having cared for any patients with Valley Fever in the last 12 months.

“Valley Fever is an important infectious disease which can lead to chronic illness. Misdiagnosis and delays in diagnosis can lead to poor outcomes in patients and unnecessary medical costs,” said Dr. Chad Smelser, a medical epidemiologist for DOH.

DOH is launching education and awareness campaign to improve diagnosis and treatment of the disease. The Department is partnering with the University of Arizona’s Valley Fever Center of Excellence and the Arizona Department of Health Services to educate clinicians throughout New Mexico about Valley Fever and its diagnosis and treatment. The initiative also involves a public awareness campaign that includes educational seminars, billboards and the production of a documentary on the disease and its consequences.

To read the full report including the survey results, go online to:

http://www.nmborderhealth.org/documents/CocciReport_2011_v2_FINAL_110811.pdf

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