

HANTAVIRUS

What is hantavirus?

Hantavirus is a virus that causes serious respiratory illness called Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS). HPS was first reported in the United States in 1993 and has since been identified throughout the country. Although rare, HPS is potentially deadly.

What are the symptoms of hantavirus?

Symptoms include fever, chills, muscle aches, and sometimes nausea, vomiting, and abdominal pain. The muscle aches are often severe. Persons with hantavirus develop coughing and shortness of breath from a few days to a week after onset of other symptoms, followed by respiratory distress. The disease is fatal in about 40-50% of people who develop symptoms.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually appear about 2-4 weeks after exposure to the virus, with a range of 1-6 weeks.

How is hantavirus spread?

A person may be exposed to hantavirus by inhaling dust after disturbing nests or breathing in closed spaces inhabited by infected mice. The deer mouse is the main carrier of hantavirus in the U.S., but other wild rodents can cause problems as well. The deer mouse can have the virus without showing any signs of illness. Deer mice spread the virus in their urine, saliva, droppings, and nesting materials.

How is Hantavirus diagnosed?

Hantavirus infection may be suspected in people who develop severe respiratory symptoms without other known causes. In addition to the physician's examination and chest X-rays, there are tests that can be done on blood or tissue to diagnose hantavirus infections. These tests are not used routinely for people with mild flu-like illnesses.

How long is a person infectious (contagious) with Hantavirus?

Person-to-person spread of Hantavirus has not occurred in the United States.

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How can I prevent a Hantavirus infection?

Minimize contact with wild rodents and their droppings and nestings by removing potential food, water, and shelter for the rodents. Hantaviruses have been shown to survive in the environment for 2 to 3 days at normal room temperature. The ultraviolet rays in sunlight do kill hantavirus.

1. **Keep mice away from your home and workplace.** Clear the area within 100 feet of your house of junk piles, debris, and other areas where mice will nest. Keep weeds, brush, and grass cut. Plug up, screen, or cover all openings in your house that a mouse might get through (larger than ¼ inch wide). Use steel wool to plug holes around the base of buildings. Stack firewood, lumber and hay 12 inches off the ground and as far away from the house as possible. Use snap traps to catch the rodents.
2. **Remove food sources and nesting places.** Store pet food, grains, and animal feed in covered containers. Use a plastic trash can with a lid for kitchen garbage and food scraps.
3. **Clean up infested buildings, cabins, and other outdoor buildings carefully.** Air out infested buildings at least 30 minutes before entering. Wear rubber gloves when handling contaminated traps or mice. Do not dry dust, sweep, or vacuum. Wet mop with a disinfected solution. Wet down nests and other contaminated material with disinfectant (1 cup bleach diluted in 10 cups water OR phenol-based cleaner, OR other disinfectant) and discard the material in two sealed plastic bags. Dispose of in the garbage.

Hantavirus is a Washington State reportable disease and must be reported to your local health department. In Snohomish County, contact Communicable Disease Surveillance and Response at 425.339.5278, Monday through Friday, 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM.

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