

The cold winter weather can bring a deadly virus...



County of San Diego
Health and Human
Services



Hantavirus

Mortal but Preventable



County of San Diego

 Vector Control Program



Protecting the environment and enhancing public health by preventing disease, promoting environmental responsibility and, when necessary, enforcing environmental and public health laws.

• **Vector Control** •
 9325 Hazard Way
 San Diego, CA 92123
 (858) 694-2888

The cold winter weather can bring a deadly virus:

Hantavirus **Mortal but Preventable**

While some people think that mice and rats are cute and cuddly, rodents can carry and spread diseases that can harm humans. Cleaning up rodent droppings and their nesting materials can be harmful to your health, or even deadly if not done properly.

One of the diseases that rodents can carry is Hantavirus. Hantavirus is a virus that is carried by wild rodents, primarily deer mice. This virus can cause Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) in humans. HPS is a rare illness that can be fatal. About 40% to 50% of people who get the virus die from it. Protect yourself and your family by learning about the virus and how to avoid it.

Hantavirus is an airborne disease. Infection occurs when airborne virus particles from rodent urine, droppings or saliva are inhaled by humans. The virus particles settle in the lungs and can lead to severe illness.

Symptoms

Symptoms may appear 1 to 6 weeks after exposure to rodent's droppings and urine.

The first signs of illness are similar to flu symptoms and include fatigue, fever and muscle aches. They may also include headache, dizziness, chills, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and abdominal pain. Later symptoms of HPS include coughing, fluid in the lungs, shortness of breath rapidly progressing to severe difficulty in breathing, and sometimes death.

The virus does not spread from person to person.



Deer Mice:

Deer mice are the main carriers of Hantavirus in the western United States. Mice do not get sick from the virus.

In San Diego County, deer mice are mostly found in rural areas, the desert and mountains. They can also live in open spaces near urban areas. Avoid contact with all wild rodents, because they may also carry diseases.

The mice that commonly live with humans are "house mice", not "deer mice". House mice do not carry Hantavirus.



Early Symptoms:

- Fever
- Headaches
- Muscle aches
- Stomach problems
- Dizziness
- Chills



Late Symptoms:

- Lungs fill with fluid
- Shortness of breath

Antibiotics will not cure Hantavirus. However, medical care provided by health care professionals can help reduce the severity of symptoms while nursing the infected person back to health. Seek medical care right away if you have these symptoms and have been exposed to rodents or their droppings. Be sure to tell your doctor that you have been around rodents and their droppings.

While Hantavirus is not curable, there are several precautions that you can take to prevent exposure to rodents. Always avoid rodent infested areas and do not stir up dust or materials that may be contaminated with their droppings and urine.

There are several ways of preventing hantavirus infections. Personal protection measures listed next will help lower exposure to airborne particles when cleaning up rodent droppings.

Some activities may put people at higher risk for exposure to Hantavirus. Take precautions or avoid these activities whenever possible:

- Working in barns or out-buildings
- Living in rodent-infested areas
- Occupying places that have been empty for a long time
- Using bare hands to handle grain that could be contaminated with rodent droppings
- Hiking or camping in rodent-infested areas

Follow these steps to let mice know that they are not welcome guests in your home.

One of the best ways to prevent exposure to Hantavirus is to stop rodents from entering.

- Seal all holes large enough for mice to get in, about the size of a dime
- Cover or pick up pet food dishes when not in use
- Store pet food in sealed, rodent-proof containers
- Cover all trash cans with rodent-proof lids
- Use mouse traps where there is evidence of mouse activity
- Remove woodpiles, old cars, trash and debris where rodents may live
- Store hay or firewood at least 100 feet away from structures
- Cut grass, weeds and trim bushes within 100 feet of structures.
- If you have paper or delicate materials that you think may have come in contact with hantavirus, you can place them in sunlight particles or move them to a rodent free area for several days.

If you find rodent droppings in your home, cabin or barn, eliminate rodent infestations immediately! Do not vacuum, sweep, dust or use an air blower. Use the following precautions:

1

Air out buildings for at least 30 minutes before entering by opening up all doors and windows (extremely important!)

2

“Wet cleaning” methods are the safest way to clean droppings and avoid inhaling the virus. **Use wet cleaning methods:**

- Always wear latex or rubber gloves
- Make a disinfectant solution (9 parts water to 1 part bleach) or use a store-bought disinfectant and follow the label instructions
- Spray with disinfectant on contaminated areas, droppings, nesting materials and dead rodents
- Let the disinfectant sit for 15-20 minutes before cleaning
- Soak sponges in the disinfectant and then clean contaminated areas
- Place all cleaning materials in a double sealed plastic bags and throw away immediately in an outdoor garbage can.
- Place dead rodents and their nesting material in a double sealed plastic bags and place them in an outdoor garbage can.

3

After cleaning, first wash gloved hands with soap and water

4

Remove gloves and dispose of them in the trash

5

Wash bare hands with soap and water to disinfect paper or delicate materials, place them in direct sunlight for several hours to kill the virus.

Wear face mask to prevent breathing in virus particles

Remember, Hantavirus is a preventable. Take steps to keep rodents outside, eliminate food sources and remove places for them to live. Natural predators, such as snakes, owls and hawks can also help to control rodent populations around your home.

To learn more about Hantavirus please call (858)694-2888 or visit our Web site at: www.SDVector.com