



FACT SHEET

Hantavirus Infection (Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome or HPS)

What is it?

Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) is a severe illness caused by infection with the *Sin Nombre* virus. Humans become infected from exposure to the droppings of wild rodents that carry the virus.

What are the symptoms?

- Symptoms develop between approximately one week and six weeks after exposure to rodent droppings that are contaminated with the virus.
- Early symptoms are fever, chills, weakness, and muscle aches. The muscle aches are often severe and can involve the thighs, hips, back and shoulders.
- Other symptoms may include headache, lightheadedness, dizziness, abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.
- In severe cases, lung involvement with coughing and shortness of breath and low blood pressure follow the early symptoms by a few days to about a week.

How is a person exposed to Hantaviruses?

- Hantavirus infections are spread to people when viruses in rodent urine, dropping or saliva are stirred into the air and breathed in.
- A person may be exposed to hantaviruses by actions that raise dust into the air, such as disturbing nests or cleaning areas where infected rodents have been.
- Not all rodents are infected with hantaviruses and infected rodents may carry the virus without appearing sick. The number of infected rodents probably change from year to year based on environmental conditions.

Treatment

- There is no specific treatment or vaccine for hantavirus infection. Early recognition of symptoms and prompt evaluation by a health care provider are important so that supportive care can be provided.

Can I get Hantavirus from another person or animal?

- No. Only rodents carry the virus. There have been no cases of person-to-person spread of hantavirus infection in the U.S.

How can I avoid exposure?

- Keep rodents away from your home, workplace, and places such as cabins, sheds, barns, garages and storage facilities.
- Clear the area within 100 feet of your house of junk piles, debris or old cars where rodents will nest. Keep weeds, brush and grass cut.
- Plug up, screen, or cover all openings into your home that rodents might get through (larger than ¼ inch wide). Use steel wool to plug holes around base of buildings. Stack firewood, lumber and hay 12 inches off the ground and as far away from the home as possible.
- Don't store pet food uncovered or in open feeding dishes. Store grains and animal feed in containers with tight fitting covers.
- Use a plastic trash can with a lid for kitchen garbage or food scraps. Tightly cover outdoor garbage cans and raise them 12 inches off the ground.
- Never touch live rodents. If you use poison bait, follow the directions carefully. Do not leave poisons where small children or animals have access to it. Wear gloves and dust masks when handling dead rodents.

What precautions should I use when working, camping or hiking outdoors?

- Avoid contact with rodents, do not disturb dens or nests.
- Stay out of cabins or shelters until they have been disinfected and aired out.
- Pitch tents well away from garbage cans, woodpiles or other places rodents live.
- Avoid areas where you see burrows or rodent droppings.
- Do not sleep on the bare ground, use a tent with a floor.
- Keep food and food scraps in tightly covered containers.
- Clean dishes and cooking utensils right after using them.

How do I clean areas where rodents have been?

If you are cleaning out a building that has been closed up, such as a cabin, shed or garage, or areas where rodent nesting materials have been found, follow these steps:

- Air out the building for at least 30 minutes by opening windows and doors. Leave the building while it is airing out.
- Wear latex or rubber gloves and a dust mask when cleaning.
- Avoid raising dust that may spread the virus through the air. **Do not** vacuum, sweep or dust. Carefully spray the urine and droppings with a disinfectant or a mixture of bleach and water and let soak 5 minutes. The recommended concentration of bleach solution is 1 part bleach to 9 part water.
- Use a paper towel to pick up the urine and droppings, and dispose of the waste in a garbage bag. After the rodent droppings and urine have been removed, disinfect items that might have been contaminated by rodents or their urine and droppings.
- Mop floors and clean countertops with disinfectant or bleach solution. Steam clean carpets, rugs, and upholstered furniture with evidence of rodent exposure.

- Wash clothes and bedding in hot water and detergent if exposed to rodent urine or droppings. Set the dryer on high.
- To dispose of contaminated items, including dead rodents, put them in a plastic bag. Seal the bag and place it in another plastic bag. Seal the outer bag and place it in an outdoor garbage can.
- When you are done, disinfect or throw away the gloves you used. Wash your hands or shower with soap and hot water.

If I find rodents can I have them tested for Hantavirus?

Hantavirus testing is done at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention only as part of investigations into human cases, and is not available on a routine basis.

For more information:

Center for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hanta/hps>

Report all cases to El Paso Department of Public Health by calling 915-212-6520