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Epidemiology and Response Division
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HANTAVIRUS PULMONARY SYNDROME FACT SHEET

What is it?

Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome is a severe respiratory illness that can be deadly. It is caused by the Sin Nombre Virus, one of a family of viruses that are found worldwide.

Who can get hantavirus?

Anyone can become infected with hantavirus, but people who have exposure to rodents or to rodent infested areas are at highest risk of infection.

How is hantavirus infection acquired?

The disease is transmitted through rodent urine, droppings and saliva; the virus gets in the air as mist. Breathing in the virus is the most common way of becoming infected; however, you can also become infected by touching anything (tools, furniture, and clothing) where the virus has been deposited and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

Can I get hantavirus from another person who is infected with it?

No, the type of hantavirus found in the U.S. cannot be transmitted from person to person.

What rodents carry hantavirus?

In New Mexico, the deer mouse is the main carrier of the disease. The white-footed mouse and cotton rat also carry other strains of hantavirus. All wild mice and rats should be considered potential carriers of hantavirus. There is no evidence that squirrels or rabbits carry hantavirus.

What does a deer mouse look like?

A deer mouse is four to nine inches long from head to tail. It is pale grey to reddish brown with white fur on its underside, white feet and a bi-colored tail that is dark on top and white on the sides and below. Several related species of mice look very similar to the deer mouse.

What are the symptoms of hantavirus infection?

The early symptoms of hantavirus are much like the flu: fever, fatigue and severe muscle aches. About half of patients also experience headaches, dizziness, chills, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain and diarrhea. A few days after these initial symptoms, the disease may progress to severe shortness of breath and coughing as the lungs fill with fluid, a serious respiratory disease called Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome that can

result in respiratory failure. Some people have mild infections that don't require intensive care treatment.

How long after contact with a rodent do the symptoms of hantavirus appear?

Symptoms of Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome usually appear two to three weeks after infection but can appear as early as one week or as long as six weeks after infection.

What is the treatment for hantavirus?

There is no specific medicine or cure for people with hantavirus. However, early detection and supportive care in a hospital have been the best treatment.

What should I do if I think I have hantavirus?

If you have a fever (101° to 104°) with any combination of severe muscle aches, headache, respiratory symptoms or gastrointestinal symptoms (as noted above) after direct or indirect exposure to rodents, contact your doctor or seek medical attention immediately and be sure to mention your exposure to rodents.

I found a dead mouse in my house. What should I do?

With rubber gloves on, spray the dead rodent, droppings and contaminated area with a general household disinfectant or a 10% bleach solution made of 1 ½ cups bleach in one gallon of water. Once everything is wet, take up contaminated materials with a damp towel, then mop or sponge the area with disinfectant. Discard the disinfectant-soaked rodents and droppings into a plastic bag, and then place in a second plastic bag, seal and discard. Wash your gloved hands with disinfectant before removing gloves and then wash your hands with soap and water after removing gloves.

I found a dead mouse. Is it likely it died of hantavirus?

No. Hantavirus does not kill the rodents that are infected with it.

A mouse has bitten me. Am I at risk of getting hantavirus from a rodent bite?

It might be possible that hantavirus infection can be contracted through rodent bites. However, the disease is contracted mainly by breathing fresh or dried urine, feces or saliva from rodents.

I was recently in contact with rodents. What can I do to prevent hantavirus infection?

There is no medicine or vaccine that will prevent the hantavirus disease, but you can prevent it by avoiding contact with rodents and using these prevention techniques:

KEEP YOUR HOME CLEAN AND CONTROL RODENTS:

- **CLEAN UP** dead mice, mouse droppings and nests by spraying with a 10% bleach solution or a household disinfectant until thoroughly wet. Wear rubber gloves and wipe up the wet materials with paper towels and place the dead rodents, droppings, and other materials in a plastic bag and seal. Put the plastic bag into another plastic bag, seal and dispose of in the trash. Spray or mop the

area again with disinfectant. Carpets and furniture can be disinfected or shampooed. Bedding and clothes can be washed using lots of soap and hot water. Leave books, papers and other items that cannot be cleaned with a liquid disinfectant outdoors in the sunlight for several hours. Wipe the items with a cloth moistened with disinfectant.

Limit food sources for rodents by storing all food and garbage in containers with tight fitting lids. Do not leave pet food, human food, water or dirty dishes or cooking utensils out over night. Store animal feed in metal or thick plastic containers with tight-fitting lids. Elevate hay, woodpiles and garbage cans at least 12 inches to eliminate possible nesting sites. Store them at least 100 feet away from your house, if possible. Clear weeds, brush, and dense shrubbery from around house foundations. Haul away abandoned vehicles and other items that might provide nesting sites for rodents.

- **AIR OUT** structures that have been closed and may contain mice. Open doors and windows and air out for at least 30 minutes before cleaning. Special precautions including the use of respirators with N-100 filters should be taken before entering a heavily infested structure.
- **SEAL UP** buildings and structures so that mice cannot enter (deer mice can enter a hole as small as a dime). Use sturdy materials that rodents cannot chew through such as metal lath, cement, copper mesh or other patching materials.
- **TRAP UP** mice using snap traps baited with peanut butter. Thoroughly spray the dead mice and traps with disinfectant; wear rubber gloves and place dead mice and traps in a plastic bag, seal and place in another plastic bag before discarding in the trash. To prevent exposure to plague-infected fleas from the trapped rodents, apply an insecticide labeled for household use around the rodent trap, to kill any fleas that may jump off the mouse. Always follow label directions.

Will camping put me at risk for hantavirus infection?

There should be no increased risk of the infection for anyone who engages in outdoor activities. However, people using cabins, trailers and other structures that have been unused for a period of time should air out the structures and take precautions to prevent rodent exposure.

Avoid contact with rodents and their burrows, and avoid placing tents or sleeping bags near rodent burrows, nests or droppings. Keep food in rodent-proof containers to avoid attracting rodents to your campsite, and carry out all garbage and trash.

Are my pets or livestock at risk of getting hantavirus?

There is no evidence that pets or livestock can get sick from hantavirus. However, dogs or cats that hunt can bring infected rodents into the home.