

Hantavirus

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“Rodents transmit many human diseases . . .”



A Hantavirus carrier, the deer mouse has white feet and stockings and a white underbelly.

Hantavirus, a severe respiratory disease, has killed an estimated 60 percent of the people who have become infected with it in the United States. The virus is named after the Hantaan River in Korea where it was first isolated. Beginning with a Hantavirus epidemic in the spring of 1993 in the Four Corners region of Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah, 73 people in 17 states have been reported infected with the virus and 42 have died. Five cases have been reported from Idaho.

Several rodents have been implicated as carriers of the virus, but the most common is the deer mouse. Western chipmunks have also been implicated.

Infection and disease symptoms

People usually become infected when they inhale rodent saliva, urine, or feces that have entered the air following disturbance. Exposure can also occur through broken skin or through the membranes of the eye. The virus can be ingested in contaminated food and water or transferred directly during rodent bites.

Symptoms commonly associated with the disease appear about 2 weeks after exposure. They consist of fever, headache, muscle aches, and cough, rapidly progressing to a severe lung disease and often death. Once the lungs become

involved, there is often no effective treatment.

People are most likely to become exposed while occupying previously vacant cabins or buildings, cleaning barns and other outbuildings, disturbing rodent-infested areas while hiking or camping, inhabiting dwellings with rodent infestations, or visiting or working in areas with high populations of rodents.

Anyone developing a fever or respiratory illness within 45 days of exposure should seek medical attention. Be sure to inform the physician of any potential exposure to rodent-contaminated areas so your blood can be analyzed for Hantavirus antibodies.

Disease prevention



Eliminate rodent populations in and around the immediate vicinity of the home, cabin, or workplace using cats, ferrets, traps, or poison baits.



Repair holes in walls and floors to prevent rodents from entering.



Place stored foods in rodent-proof containers.



Seal garbage containers to keep out rodents.



Remove other possible sources of food and water.



Clean in and around structures to eliminate places for rodents to breed. Such places include lumber or boards piled near buildings and other protected spots.



Clean mouse traps after use and disinfect them with hypochlorite solution (3/4 cup household bleach in 1 gallon of water).



Do not sleep on the floor or on bare ground in rodent-infested areas.

Cleaning contaminated areas

When cleaning contaminated areas, prevent dust from becoming airborne. If you vacuum, keep the vacuum cleaner outside and bring the hose only inside.

Thoroughly wet dead rodents, droppings, nests, foods, and other contaminated items with a spray of hypochlorite solution (3/4 cup bleach in 1 gallon of water). Sweep the materials and place them in plastic bags for burial or burning.

Disinfect contaminated drawers, countertops, furniture, and durable surfaces with hypochlorite solution.

Mop contaminated floors with hypochlorite solution before sweeping them. Next, mop the floors with a floor cleaner.

Disinfect carpeted areas or have them steam cleaned commercially.

Launder contaminated bedding and clothing in hot water and detergent and dry on the high heat setting.

People who clean homes, cabins, buildings, or sheds that have had heavy rodent infestations should take special precautions. Wear coveralls, rubber gloves, a dust mask, goggles, and rubber boots. Disinfect contaminated clothing or destroy it after use. Place waste material in plastic bags and burn or bury it.

The deer mouse

The deer mouse is about the size of a house mouse, with white feet and stockings and a white underbelly. The rest of the body is gray in juveniles and buff colored in adults. The tail is covered with short hair.

Deer mice are common throughout the United States but are less common in urban areas where they are replaced by the more aggressive house mouse. The house mouse is not known to be a carrier of Hantavirus.

Avoid rodents

Rodents transmit many human diseases and are associated with filth. Western chipmunks have been implicated as vectors of Hantavirus. Fleas of rats and wild rodents have been known to transmit plague. Ticks from pack rats transmit relapsing fever. Close association with rodents presents potentially serious health problems and should be avoided.

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