

Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome

Hantavirus pulmonary* syndrome (HPS) is an infectious disease that can cause death. It is spread to people by rodents, such as rats and mice. The question-and-answer sections presented below contain information about HPS and how to prevent it. Following these tips will help reduce your risk of getting this disease.

Hantavirus Infections

Q. When was HPS detected in the United States?

- A. Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome was first detected in the United States in 1993. At that time, cases were occurring in the Four Corners area of the Southwest (the point where Colorado, Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico meet). The first case of HPS in Texas was also reported in 1993.

Q. What are the symptoms of HPS?

- A. Early symptoms of HPS are much like symptoms of the flu. They usually appear 1 to 3 weeks (sometimes as many as 6 weeks) after exposure and include:

- fever
- chills
- body aches
- headache
- vomiting
- stomach pain
- dry cough
- rapid onset of severe respiratory (breathing) failure.

* relating to the lungs

Q. How can I get HPS?

- A. Some rodents can carry hantaviruses and are never sick. They may have the virus in their droppings (feces), urine, and saliva. From here, the virus can spread in the air on dust particles. You can then inhale them. You can also be infected if you touch your nose or mouth after handling items (for example, tools or clothing) that have the virus on them.

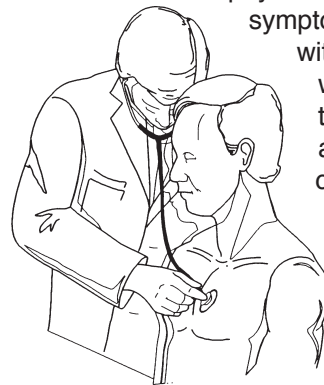
Things you do may increase your possibility of contact with the virus. These include cleaning barns, cabins, or sheds and having outdoor hobbies, such as camping, hiking, or hunting.

Q. Can I get this disease from a pet?

- A. There have been no known cases in the United States in which the virus was spread from pets or livestock to people.

Q. What do I do if I think I have HPS?

- A. Always see a physician if you have sudden and severe shortness of breath. Also call a physician if you have flu-like symptoms after contact with rodents or their wastes. Be sure to tell the physician about the type of contact you had.



(Texas does not have frequent cases of HPS.)

Q. Is there any treatment for HPS?

- A. Patients with HPS can receive relief through supportive treatment. Antibiotics will not cure a hantavirus infection.

Rodent Control and Disposal

Q. What kind of animals carry hantavirus?

- A. Only certain rodents (such as wild rats and mice) are known to carry hantavirus. The common house mouse is not associated with spreading hantavirus in the United States.

Q. Since rodents are usually active at night, how will I know if I have them in my home or business?

- A. Even if you do not see rodents, you will know they are present by seeing their droppings (which look like black grains of rice), trails, rub and gnaw marks, tracks, or nests. Rodent nests are made of various materials, such as twigs, grass, insulation, and newspaper.


If you need help with rodent control, contact a pest management professional.


Q. How can I prevent having rodent problems?


- A. Remove the three things rodents need to survive: food, water, and shelter.
- Keep food in a refrigerator or in sealed containers. Wash dishes and remove spilled food. Place garbage in a can with a tight-fitting lid.
 - Do not leave food for animals in feeding dishes overnight.
 - Promptly dispose of trash and clutter.
 - Seal or screen all openings to the house. Use caulk to seal cracks and steel wool or metal screen to close larger holes.
 - Keep lumber and fire wood stored outdoors on racks, not on the ground.


Q. What can I do if I find dead rodents or their nests, droppings, or urine?


A. To dispose of rodents and their wastes, follow these steps:

 Before cleaning, spray the area with an insecticide that kills fleas. Also treat your pets for fleas. Be sure to follow label directions. Fleas feed on the blood of rodents. When this source of blood is gone, the fleas may feed on humans. No facts suggest that fleas can give you hantavirus. However, they can give you diseases such as typhus and plague.


 Set spring-loaded (snap) traps. Place traps where children and pets cannot reach them.


 When you are cleaning, wear a face mask that will help trap dust so you do not inhale it. For general cleaning purposes, a N95 mask may be easier to find at a hardware store and might provide some level of protection. A N95 mask looks like a surgical mask. When cleaning areas heavily affected by rodents, a N100 mask or a respirator with a N100/HEPA (high efficiency particulate air) filter may be needed to provide enough protection.


 Do not touch the rodent or its wastes with your bare hands. Wear waterproof gloves (such as latex, rubber, or vinyl).

 After the rodent has been trapped, pour disinfectant (such as bleach mixed according to label directions) on the rodent and its nest, droppings, and urine.



 Place the rodent and other materials in a plastic bag. Include items used in the cleanup process. Tie or “zip lock” the bag and place it in another bag. Dispose of this bag in an outdoor garbage can or bury it.

 Use disinfectant on the surface where the rodent was found.

 Wash your hands.



Hantavirus

Pulmonary Syndrome



Texas Department of State Health Services
Zoonosis Control
04/2012 Stock No. 7-37