

NEWS RELEASE

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North Dakota Department of Health Reminds Residents to Use Care While Cleaning to Avoid Hantavirus Disease

BISMARCK, N.D. – With the Memorial Day weekend approaching, many people will be cleaning cabins and other buildings that have been closed for the winter. The North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) reminds everyone of the importance of protecting themselves against hantavirus disease.

Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS) is a viral infection that causes severe lung disease. Infected rodents spread the virus in their urine, droppings, and saliva. The virus is transmitted to people when they breathe in air contaminated by the virus, and on rare occasions it can be transmitted through an infected rodent bite. The deer mouse is the primary carrier of the virus.

“Hantavirus infection has been associated with the presence of rodents, rodent droppings, and nests, which can be found when cleaning or occupying previously vacant cabins, sheds, or other dwellings and outbuildings,” said Michelle Feist, Epidemiology and Surveillance Program Manager with the Department of Health’s Division of Disease Control. “Since there is no treatment for hantavirus disease, except for supportive care, it is important to clean rodent infestation properly to prevent infection.”

NDDoH offers the following tips for cleaning a building with signs of rodent infestation to avoid hantavirus infection:

- Ventilate the space by opening the doors and windows for 30 minutes before you start cleaning
- Do not stir up dust by sweeping or vacuuming up droppings, urine or nesting materials
- Wear gloves and use disinfectant when cleaning up dead rodents or their urine, droppings and nests
- Saturate the material with disinfectant for five minutes before removal
- Mop floors and clean countertops, cabinets and drawers with disinfectant
- Use a commercial EPA-registered disinfectant following the label instructions or a bleach solution made with one-part bleach and nine parts water

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Symptoms of HPS usually begin two to three weeks after infection. Early symptoms commonly include fever, muscle and body aches, fatigue, headache, dizziness, chills, nausea and vomiting. The illness worsens within a short period of time to include coughing and shortness of breath as lungs fill with fluid.

Fourteen cases of HPS have been reported to the Department of Health since 1993, when the virus was first recognized in the United States. Seven of the 14 reported cases were fatal. One case was reported in 2015, this individual has since recovered. Nationally, through Jan. 6, 2016, 690 cases have been reported with 36 percent resulting in death. More than 96% of the reported cases have occurred in states west of the Mississippi River.

For more information, contact Michelle Feist, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2378.

Please note:

A fact sheet containing important precautions to minimize the risk of hantavirus pulmonary syndrome infection is available at www.ndhealth.gov/Disease/Documents/faqs/Hantavirus.pdf.

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