

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. – The North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) reminds everyone of the importance of protection against hantavirus disease. As spring begins, many people will be cleaning cabins and other buildings that have been closed for the winter. These are places where one is more likely to be exposed to the virus.

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 when an individual breathes 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.

“People are most often exposed to hantavirus when cleaning or occupying previously vacant cabins, sheds or other dwellings and outbuildings that contain rodents, rodent droppings and rodent nests,” said Jill Baber, epidemiologist with the NDDoH Division of Disease Control. “There is no treatment for hantavirus disease, except for supportive care, so it is important to clean up rodent infestations 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
- 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
- Do not stir up dust by sweeping or vacuuming up droppings, urine or nesting materials
- Do not let children play in crawl spaces or vacant buildings where rodents may be present

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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. Within a short period of time symptoms will worsen to include coughing and shortness of breath as lungs fill with fluid. People with HPS are typically hospitalized.

Fifteen cases of HPS have been reported to the NDDoH since 1993, when the virus was first recognized in the United States. Seven of the 15 reported cases were fatal. Nationally, 690 cases have been reported with 36 percent resulting in death through Jan. 6, 2016. More than 96 percent of the reported cases have occurred in states west of the Mississippi River.

For more information, contact Jill Baber, NDDoH, 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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