

NEWS RELEASE

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For More Information, Contact:
Jill Baber, MPH
Division of Disease Control
Phone: 701.328.2378
E-mail: jbaber@nd.gov

Use Care While Cleaning to Avoid Hantavirus Disease

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) reminds residents to protect themselves against hantavirus disease. As the weather warms, individuals will be cleaning cabins and other buildings that have been closed for the winter. These are places where exposure to hantavirus is most likely.

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 deer mouse is the primary carrier of the virus.

“People are most often exposed to hantavirus when they breathe in dust while 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 to avoid hantavirus infection when cleaning a building with signs of rodent infestation:

- Ventilate the space by opening doors and windows for 30 minutes before you start cleaning.
- Wear gloves and use disinfectant when cleaning up dead rodents, as well as their urine, droppings or nests.
- Saturate the material with disinfectant for five minutes before removal.
- Mop floors and clean countertops, cabinets, and drawers with disinfectant.
- Use a commercial disinfectant registered with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and follow the label instructions or use 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.

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, through January 2017, 697 cases were reported and 36 percent of those cases resulted in death. More than 96 percent of the reported cases occurred in states west of the Mississippi River.

For more information, contact Jill Baber, NDDoH, at 701.328.2378.

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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