

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:
August 27, 2018

For More Information, Contact:
Jill Baber, MPH
Division of Disease Control
North Dakota Department of Health
Phone: 701.328.2378
Email: jbaber@nd.gov

Hantavirus-Related Death Reported in North Dakota

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) announced today that a resident of North Dakota has become sick and passed away from Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS), a rare but potentially fatal disease spread by infected rodent droppings, urine and saliva. The individual, an adult female from the northeast portion of the state, did have possible contact with rodent urine or droppings or rodents in the environment.

People can be exposed to hantavirus by breathing in air contaminated with the virus when fresh rodent dropping, urine, or nesting materials are disturbed. The greatest risk is associated with exposure to rodent droppings in closed, dry areas. Hantavirus is not transmitted from person to person.

“People need to be mindful of the presence or evidence of wild rodents or rodent nests when conducting clean-up activities in a house, barn or other buildings, especially in rural areas,” said Jill Baber, epidemiologist for the NDDoH. “It is important to avoid actions that stir up dust, such as sweeping or vacuuming, if signs of rodents are present.”

The NDDoH recommends the following steps to safely clean up areas with possible rodent infestation:

- Ventilate the space by opening the doors and windows for 30 minutes. You should leave the area during this period.
- Do not stir up dust by sweeping or vacuuming up droppings, urine, or nesting materials.
- Wear gloves and spray dead rodents, droppings or nesting materials with disinfectant. Use a paper towel to pick up the urine and droppings and dispose of the waste in the garbage.
- Mop floors and clean countertops, cabinets and drawers with disinfectant.
- Wash your hands with soap and water immediately after the cleanup.
- Do not have young children assist with cleanup of potentially infectious material.

-more-

Symptoms of HPS can occur up to six weeks after exposure, with most cases showing symptoms within about two weeks. Early symptoms commonly include fever, muscle and body aches, fatigue, headache, dizziness, chills, nausea and vomiting. Within a few days the illness progresses to include coughing and severe shortness of breath as the lungs fill with fluid. Anyone with exposure to wild rodents who experiences these symptoms should contact their physician and tell them about their exposure.

The last reported case in North Dakota was in 2016. Including this case, there have been 16 cases of HPS that have been reported to the NDDoH since 1993, when the virus was first recognized in the United States. Eight of the sixteen cases were fatal. Nationally, through January 2017, 728 cases have been reported with 36 percent resulting in death. More than 96 percent of all cases in the U.S. have occurred in states west of the Mississippi River.

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. For more information, contact Jill Baber, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2378.

– 30 –