

**NEWS RELEASE** | **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** | May 2, 2019

## **Use care while cleaning to avoid hantavirus disease**

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) reminds residents to take steps to protect themselves against hantavirus disease. As the weather warms, many people will be cleaning cabins, sheds and other outdoor 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 can cause severe lung disease. Typically, infected rodents spread the virus in their urine, droppings and saliva. The virus is transmitted when someone breathes in air contaminated by the virus, and on rare occasions, it can be transmitted through an infected rodent bite.

“People are most often exposed to hantavirus when they inhale dust while cleaning or occupying previously vacant cabins, sheds or other dwellings and outbuildings that contain rodents, rodent droppings and rodent nests,” said Michelle Dethloff, epidemiologist with the NDDoH Division of Disease Control. “Currently, there is no specific treatment, just general medical care to treat symptoms. It is important to be cautious when cleaning rodent infestations to properly 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 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. Let it soak per manufacturer’s instructions on the label 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 (10% solution).
- 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.

Seventeen cases of HPS have been reported to the NDDoH since 1993 when the virus was first recognized in the United States. Eight (47%) of the 17 reported cases were fatal. Through 2017, 728 cases have been reported nationally, with 36% resulting in death. More than 96% of the reported cases have occurred in states west of the Mississippi River.

For more information, contact Michelle Dethloff, NDDoH, at 701-328-2378.

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*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](http://www.ndhealth.gov/Disease/Documents/faqs/Hantavirus.pdf).*

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