



County of San Diego
Department of Environmental Health



Vector Control Program

HANTAVIRUS FACT SHEET

- Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) is a rare, but frequently fatal, illness currently being diagnosed in many parts of the country, including California.
- HPS is caused by a virus that is carried by wild rodents, primarily deer mice.
- Incubation period: About 2 weeks (range - a few days to 6 weeks). Early symptoms are flu-like and include fatigue, fever and muscle aches. Other early symptoms (in about 50% of HPS patients) include headache, dizziness, chills, and abdominal problems, such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal pain.
- Later symptoms (4 to 10 days later) include coughing, shortness of breath, and difficulty breathing sometimes leading to death.
- If you are exposed to rodents or their excretions and become ill with flu-like symptoms in 1 to 6 weeks after exposure, immediately contact your health care provider.
- There is no specific treatment or cure for Hantavirus infection. Early diagnosis and good supportive care are important.
- The virus is shed in rodent urine, droppings, and saliva. People can get infected by stirring up rodent urine, droppings or nesting materials and inhaling airborne particles containing the virus. They also can become infected by touching their mouth, nose or eyes after handling rodents, nests or droppings. Rodent bites may pose a risk on rare occasions. Some researchers suspect that eating food contaminated by urine, droppings, or saliva from an infected rodent, may also pose a risk.
- HPS in the United States is not transmitted from person to person, or from blood transfusion from a person who recovered from HPS. Household pets (dogs and cats), farm animals and rodents from pet stores (Guinea pigs, hamsters, gerbils), and insects are not known to carry Hantavirus.
- The presence of wild rodents anywhere, particularly deer mice, presents a risk for exposure.

- High risk activities include: occupying or cleaning rodent-infested buildings; having direct contact with rodents or rodent material while hiking and camping; frequenting areas where the wild rodent population has increased; and working in and around areas infested with rodents, particularly enclosed spaces.
- Because it is difficult to tell a deer mouse from another type of rodent, treat all rodents as possible sources of infection.
- Keep non-refrigerated food products in sealed containers; keep counters, cupboards and eating surfaces and utensils clean; pick up and clean spilled food immediately; use garbage containers with tight fitting lids; and do not leave pet food out overnight.
- Rodent-proof your home and other structures. Call the Department of Environmental Health's Vector Control Program at (858) 694-2888 for advice on rodent proofing your home. You may also access this information at www.sdcounty.ca.gov/deh.
- When hiking or camping outdoors do not disturb rodents, burrows or dens; check the area for droppings and burrows before setting up camp and avoid sleeping near them; also avoid sleeping on bare ground or near woodpiles or garbage areas; store you food and food preparation gear in rodent-proof containers; and promptly and properly discard all garbage.
- When opening a cabin that has not been occupied, air it out by opening all windows and doors before occupying it. If you find signs of rodent infestation do not use the cabin, until it has been cleaned using appropriate safety precautions.
- If you have to clean a rodent infested building it is important to minimize stirring up dust or material that may be contaminated with virus-laden particles. **DO NOT SWEEP OR VACUUM – USE WET CLEAN UP METHODS.**
 - Ventilate the affected area by opening doors and windows for several hours.
 - Use rubber gloves. Spray a 10% household bleach solution (2 tablespoons of bleach to 1 cup of water) onto dead rodents, rodent droppings, nests, contaminated traps and surrounding areas and let the disinfectant stand for at least 15 minutes before cleaning. Clean with a sponge or a mop – **do not sweep or vacuum.**
 - Place disinfected rodents in plastic double bags, seal them and discard.
 - Wash gloves in a bleach solution, then soap and water, and dispose of them the same way as cleaned up contaminated material. Thoroughly wash your bare hands with soap and water.

For more information or advice on cleaning or rodent proofing your home contact Vector Control at (858) 694-2888.