



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE PUBLICATION

June 14, 2006

Contact: Leslie Ridgeway (619) 685-2239

COUNTY ENCOURAGES PRECAUTIONS TO PREVENT HANTAVIRUS

Proper Cleaning Can Curb Spread of Rodent-Borne Respiratory Illness

With summer around the corner, the San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency (HHS) and Department of Environmental Health (DEH) Vector Control encourage the public to be vigilant about hantavirus.

"People who are opening their vacation cabins or homes, or opening up unused garden sheds, should take the proper precautions to prevent this respiratory illness," said Nancy Bowen, M.D., San Diego County Public Health Officer. "It is rare but can be deadly."

"In April, hantavirus was found in three wild mice trapped by Vector Control in Tierrasanta," said Gary Erbeck, Director, DEH. "The virus has been found in wild rodents in San Diego County in recent years."

Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome is caused by a virus carried by wild rodents, primarily deer mice. Infected rodents shed the virus in their droppings, urine and saliva. People who live in rural or suburban areas near undeveloped land are at higher risk from mice entering their homes. People most commonly become infected when they stir up and inhale airborne particles of contaminated rodent droppings, urine and saliva. The virus may also be spread by touching the mouth and nose after handling infected rodents or contaminated objects.

The first signs of illness are similar to flu symptoms and include fatigue, fever and muscle aches; they may also include headache, dizziness, chills, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and abdominal pain. Later symptoms of hantavirus pulmonary syndrome include coughing, shortness of breath rapidly progressing to severe difficulty in breathing, and sometimes death. There is no specific treatment, so prevention is important.

To reduce the risk of hantavirus infection: Do not vacuum, sweep or dust areas for 30 minutes after opening doors and windows. When cleaning rooms or buildings that have been empty for a long period of time, wet the surfaces with disinfectant (for example, a 10 percent bleach solution) before cleaning.

For more information, go to the following link: <http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/deh/chd/vector/vhantavirus.html>, or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention web site, www.cdc.gov, and click on Diseases and Conditions. For information on rodent control, contact DEH Vector Surveillance and Control Program at (858) 694-2888, or visit the web site at <http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/deh/>.

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