

HANTAVIRUS PULMONARY SYNDROME

What is Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome?

Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) is an illness caused by a family of viruses called Hantaviruses. These viruses cause a rare, but very serious illness of the lungs.

What are the symptoms of Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome?

Symptoms usually start about two weeks after exposure but may start as soon as one week or as long as eight weeks later. Initial symptoms are fever, tiredness and muscle aches. Persons may also develop a headache, dizziness, chills, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and stomach pain. After a few days, persons will start coughing and have hard time breathing. These breathing problems can progress to respiratory failure and sometimes death. In some cases of HPS, the kidneys and other organs will stop working.

How is Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome spread?

In New Mexico, deer mice and other similar mice carry hantavirus. It is found in mice droppings and urine. Persons may get HPS by breathing in the virus. This can happen when droppings or urine containing the virus are stirred up and the virus is put in the air as mist or dust. Persons can also get hantavirus by touching their eyes, nose, or mouth after they have touched droppings or urine that contains the virus. People can also get hantavirus from a mouse bite, but this is rare.

How long are people contagious?

People are not contagious; a person with HPS cannot give hantavirus to another person.

Who gets Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome?

Anyone who lives in an area where mice are found can get hantavirus. This includes people from all parts of New Mexico.

What treatment is available for people with Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome?

At the present time, there is no specific treatment for HPS. If you have symptoms of hantavirus you should see a doctor immediately. Early intensive hospital care can save lives.

Do infected people need to be kept home from school, work or daycare?

People who have HPS will most likely be in the hospital. Since persons with HPS cannot spread it to other persons, they can return to work or school as soon as they feel well enough.

How can I protect myself and my family from getting Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome?

- Do not sweep or vacuum up mice droppings and urine. Spray them with ready-made disinfectant or bleach and water (1 cup bleach and 9 cups of water) mixture. While wearing rubber gloves, wipe up with a paper towel. Throw away the paper towel and wash your hands immediately.
- Keep your home clean to discourage rodents: wash dishes promptly, clean counters and floors, and put pet food and water away at night, store food and garbage in containers with tight lids.
- Look for holes inside and outside your home that mice may use to get inside and seal the holes up. (Remember rodents can squeeze through holes as small as a dime.)
- Set traps inside your home and clean up dead mice safely. To do this, spray the dead rodent with the ready-made disinfectant, place it in a plastic bag, and bury it or throw it away. Wash hands immediately.
- Control mice outside your house: clear brush and grass away from the foundation, place woodpiles and garbage as far away as possible from the house and get rid of junk that can provide homes for rodents.
- Open buildings, garages or basements that have been closed-up, to air them out for at least one hour before spending time inside.
- Avoid disturbing or sleeping near rodent droppings or burrows when camping. Avoid sleeping on bare ground; use a mat or elevated cot if available. Store foods in rodent-proof containers and promptly throw away, bury or burn all garbage.