



Upper Missouri District Health Unit

"Your Public Health Professionals"

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NEWS RELEASE

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When it Comes to Hantavirus Prevention is Key

Spring has sprung and with it comes getting back into cabins, sheds and areas closed up for the winter. Upper Missouri District Health Unit would like to take this opportunity to remind people about the dangers of Hantavirus and how to prevent getting ill.

Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS) is a viral infection that causes severe lung disease. Infected rodents spread the virus in their urine, droppings, and saliva. The virus is transmitted to people when they breathe in air contaminated by the virus, and on rare occasions it can be transmitted through an infected rodent bite. The deer mouse is the primary carrier of the virus.

Cleaning areas that have mouse nests, urine and droppings puts people at risk of catching Hantavirus. "There is no specific treatment for Hantavirus," says Daphne Clark, Environmental Health Practitioner, "So we need to focus on prevention including proper cleaning to avoid infection."

UMDHU recommends these steps for cleaning a building with signs of rodent infestation to avoid Hantavirus infection:

- Ventilate the space by opening the doors and windows for 30 minutes before you start cleaning
- Do not stir up dust by sweeping or vacuuming up droppings, urine or nesting materials
- Wear gloves and use disinfectant when cleaning up dead rodents or their urine, droppings and nests. These gloves should only be used for these types of cleaning.
- Saturate the material with disinfectant for five minutes before removal.
- Spray disinfectant on dead rodents, droppings, or nesting materials. Use a paper towel to pick up urine and droppings and dispose of the waste in a garbage container.
- Mop floors and clean countertops, cabinets and drawers with disinfectant.
- Use a commercial EPA-registered disinfectant following the label instructions or a bleach solution made with one-part bleach and nine parts water.
- Wash your hands with soap and water immediately after the cleanup.
- Do not have young children assist with cleanup of potentially infectious material.

Symptoms of Hantavirus usually occur two to three weeks after infection. Early symptoms commonly include fever, muscle and body aches, fatigue, headache, dizziness, chills, nausea, and vomiting. The illness worsens within a short period of time to include coughing and severe shortness of breath when lungs fill with fluid. Anyone with exposure to wild rodents who experiences these symptoms should contact their physician.

The last reported case in North Dakota was in 2015. Including this case, there have been fifteen cases of HPS that have been reported to the North Dakota Department of Health since 1993, when the virus was first recognized in the United States. Seven of the fifteen cases were fatal. Nationally, through Jan. 6, 2016, 690 cases have been reported with 36 percent resulting in death. About 75 percent of all cases in the U.S. have occurred in residents living in rural areas.

For further information call the Upper Missouri District Health Unit 701-774-6400, 1-877-572-3763 or visit our website at www.umdhu.org or the North Dakota Department of Health Disease Control at 701.328.2378.