



Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS, Sin Nombre Virus) Fact Sheet

What is Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS)?

Hantavirus is a virus that causes respiratory disease. In the United States, deer mice (along with cotton rats and rice rats in the Southeast and the white-footed mouse in the Northeast) carry hantaviruses that cause hantavirus pulmonary syndrome. Mice do not appear ill while carrying the hantavirus.

How does a person get HPS?

People become infected after breathing airborne particles of urine, droppings or saliva from infected rodents. Most cases in the U.S. have been associated with living in rodent-infested vacant cabins or other dwellings, cleaning barns or other outbuildings, disturbing rodent-infested areas while hiking or camping, planting or harvesting fields, and living in or visiting areas where there has been an increase in rodents. The virus may be spread by handling infected rodents, their nests or droppings, and then touching the nose, mouth, or eyes. No evidence of person-to-person spread exists.

Who can be affected by HPS?

Anyone who comes into contact with rodents that carry hantavirus is at risk of HPS. Rodent infestation in and around the home remains the primary risk for hantavirus exposure. Even healthy individuals are at risk for HPS infection if exposed to the virus.

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Can animals transfer HPS?

No—the hantaviruses that cause HPS in the United States are not known to be transferred by any types of animals other than certain species of rodents. Dogs and cats are not known to carry hantavirus; however, they may bring infected rodents into contact with people. Guinea pigs, hamsters, gerbils, and rodents from pet stores are not known to carry hantavirus.

What are the symptoms of HPS infection?

The first symptoms, appearing one to five (usually 2-3) weeks after contact with the virus, are flu-like and may include: fever, muscle and body aches, chills, cough, headaches, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, and feeling tired. The lungs then begin filling with fluid, making breathing difficult. If you have been around rodents and experience these symptoms, notify your health care provider immediately.

How should I get rid of dead rodents, droppings or nests?

Removing the rodents from your home will decrease your risk for HPS. Follow these standard rodent removal and cleanup guidelines:

- Set spring traps that will kill mice. Use rubber gloves and spray the nest or dead rodent until soaked with a

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solution of 3 tablespoons of bleach in 1 gallon of water. Other disinfectants can also be used as directed. Let the area soak thoroughly for 10-15 minutes.

- Remove the nest or rodent using a long-handled shovel or rubber gloves. Double-bag the rodent or nest securely with plastic bags and dispose of them in the trash. Persons in rural areas may bury the waste 2-3 feet deep.
- Clean up the rodent area and traps by spraying with the disinfectant solution. Let the area soak for 10-15 minutes. While still wearing gloves, wipe up the area with paper towels or rags. Double-bag all paper towels, rags, and gloves used and dispose of them in a tightly covered trash container.
- Wash your hands with soap and water after completing the cleanup.

How should I clean my home after rodents are removed?

Floors, countertops, cabinets and other surfaces should be cleaned with a solution of 3 tablespoons of household bleach in 1 gallon of water, or by a commercial disinfectant. Do not sweep floors with a broom, or vacuum until the area has been disinfected. Rugs can be steam cleaned; dirt floors should be sprayed with a disinfectant solution.

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- **How can I prevent rodents from entering my home?**
- Seal, cover or screen all holes in walls or floors larger than one-quarter inch.
- Keep food (including pet food) and water covered and stored in rodent-proof metal or thick or thick plastic containers with tight-fitting lids. Clean up spilled food. Keep dishes clean.
- Store garbage in rodent-proof metal or thick plastic containers with tight-fitting lids. Keep containers at least 12 inches off the ground.
- Place three inches of gravel under the base of mobile homes to discourage rodent burrowing.
- Place woodpiles 100 feet or more away from the house and elevate wood at least one foot off the ground.
- Remove any food sources near buildings that might attract rodents.

*For further information, contact the
Oklahoma City-County Health Department
(405) 425-4437*

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