

Health Hazard Alert Bulletin: Hantavirus



Hantavirus, which causes a very serious lung infection in humans, is carried by rodents, primarily the deer mouse. The first cases were identified in the Southwestern U.S. in 1993. Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS) is potentially deadly and immediate intensive care treatment is essential once symptoms appear. The disease begins as a flu-like illness characterized by fever, chills, and muscle aches. Although only 318 cases have been identified in 31 states, the case fatality rate was 37%.

The virus is spread to humans through inhalation of aerosolized mouse droppings, urine, or saliva, or through broken skin or conjunctivae (around the eye). It is not thought to be spread from person to person in the United States.

Best Practices

The current best approach for prevention of this disease is to keep rodents from colonizing the workplace, by making as needed repairs of screens and holes or cracks in walls, and the use of safe cleanup procedures for rodent waste and nesting materials..

The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) recommends the following for workers who are cleaning areas where evidence of mice infestation is found:

- Prior to cleaning, ventilate closed buildings, or areas inside buildings, by opening doors and windows for at least one hour. Use an exhaust fan or cross ventilation if available.
- Wear rubber, latex, vinyl, or nitrile gloves when cleaning up, handling rodents, or handling traps containing rodents. **Before removing the gloves,** wash gloved hands in a disinfectant or chlorine solution, and then wash bare hands in soap and water.
- Workers should wear half-facepiece air-purifying (negative-pressure) respirators, or powered air-purifying respirators (PAPRs), equipped with N-100 or P-100 filters, when performing cleanup operations, removing rodents from traps, or handling rodents in the affected area.
- Do not permit dust to become airborne by dry sweeping or vacuuming up droppings, urine or nesting materials.
- Use a mixture of 1-½ cups of household bleach per gallon of water, or household spray disinfectant, to thoroughly wet contaminated areas. Once everything is wet, remove contaminated materials with a damp towel and then mop or sponge the area with disinfectant.



NOTE: Special precautions such as use of appropriate respiratory protection and/or use a professional exterminator may be required for homes of persons with confirmed Hantavirus infection or buildings with heavy rodent infestations. Please visit the CDC website for more information.

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hanta/hps/index.htm>

If you have questions about this Hazard Alert, or any other occupational health matter, please feel free to contact us.

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