

Hantavirus

What is hantavirus and what causes it?

Hantaviruses are a group of viruses, carried by rodents, that can cause human illness. Hantaviruses found in North, South and Central America, can cause severe respiratory (lung) disease. Hantaviruses found in Europe and Asia, can cause hemorrhages, kidney damage and death.

What animals get hantavirus?

Wild rodents are the principal animal species affected. The viruses have been found in deer mice, white-footed mice, cotton rats, rice rats, and others. The viruses have not been found in gerbils, hamsters, guinea pigs, or non-rodent pets or livestock.

How can my animal be infected by hantavirus?

Rodents become infected by bites (**direct contact**) from other rodents or by inhaling (**aerosol**) the virus in dust contaminated by rodent droppings, urine, or saliva.

How do hantavirus affect my animal?

Hantaviruses do not affect pets or livestock. Infected wild rodents do not show signs of illness, but shed the virus into the environment in their feces, urine and saliva.

Can I be infected by hantavirus?

Yes. People can become infected by breathing (**aerosol**) dust contaminated by rodent droppings, urine or saliva. The virus can also be spread by **direct contact**. This may be from a rodent bite or by contaminated dust getting into wounds, cuts in the skin, nasal passages or eyes. The virus may

also be accidentally ingested (**oral**) from food contaminated by rodents. The virus can remain in the environment for long periods and may contaminate objects (**fomites**) in the environment. The viruses found in the U.S. are not spread person to person.

Disease can range from mild to very serious illness. Severe disease affects the lungs or the kidneys, may require hospitalization and has a high risk of death. Symptoms begin 2-4 weeks after exposure and initially resembles the flu (fever, chills, headache, muscle aches). Dizziness, abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea may also occur. Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS) affects the lungs and causes severe breathing difficulty and coughing. If the kidneys are involved, the disease is called hemorrhagic fever with renal syndrome (HFRS). Abnormal urination and reddened mucous membranes may be seen. Severe cases can result in excessive bleeding (hemorrhaging) or kidney failure. Shock can occur, rapidly leading to death.

Who should I contact, if I suspect hantavirus?

In Animals – Animals do not become ill from hantavirus.

In Humans – Contact your physician immediately.

How can I protect my animal from hantavirus?

Pets and livestock do not get ill from hantavirus. Pet rodents, however, should be kept away from wild rodents and their habitats.

How can I protect myself from hantavirus?

Control and prevent rodents in and around your home. Seal any gaps ¼ inch or larger to prevent entry into the house or garage. Place traps or baits in houses and outbuildings. Keep food, animal feed, birdseed, etc. (anything that might attract rodents) in rodent-proof containers. Keep tight-fitting lids on garbage cans. Elevate hay, wood piles, and garbage cans. Clean up brush to eliminate nesting sites around the house.

When cleaning areas where rodents may have been, wear rubber gloves, allow the area to air out before entering, and wet surfaces with a disinfectant. Avoid sweeping or other activities that raise a lot of dust. If this is expected where a face mask to protect yourself.

For More Information

CFSPH Technical Fact Sheets.. Hantavirus at <http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/DiseaseInfo/default.htm>

CDC website. Hantaviruses at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hanta/hps/index.htm>

