



NEWS RELEASE

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State Health Department Issues Warning About Hantavirus Disease

BISMARCK, N.D. – People who are cleaning cabins or other buildings that were closed for the winter should protect themselves against hantavirus, a disease transmitted by infected mice, according to Julie Goplin, epidemiologist with the North Dakota Department of Health.

Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS) is a viral infection that causes severe lung disease. Mice carry the disease and can transmit the virus to people through bites, urine and fecal droppings. The disease is not transmitted from person to person.

Symptoms of HPS 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.

Nine cases of HPS have been reported to the North Dakota Department of Health since 1993; the most recent was reported in December 2006. Five of the cases were fatal. Nationwide, 465 cases have been reported since 1993, of which 35 percent were fatal.

“Hantavirus infection has been associated with cleaning or occupying previously vacant cabins or other dwellings,” Goplin said. “It’s important to take precautions while cleaning buildings that are infested with rodents. Preventing infection is important since there is no cure for the disease.”

Tips for preventing rodent infestation from occurring and properly disinfecting areas that become contaminated by rodents include:

- For severe or persistent infestations, contact a pest-control professional for rodent eradication or a building contractor for rodent exclusion (rodent proofing), or consult with the state health department by calling 800.472.2180.
- Seal all entry holes through which a rodent can enter.
- Clear clutter and tall grass away from buildings to eliminate sources of nesting materials.

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- **Do not** sweep or vacuum areas that have evidence of rodent infestation, such as nests or fecal droppings. This action may stir up and cause the virus to become airborne.
- Wear rubber, latex, vinyl or nitrile gloves.
- Thoroughly wet contaminated areas with a detergent or bleach solution.

A fact sheet containing important precautions to minimize the risk of hantavirus pulmonary syndrome infection is available at www.ndhan.gov/media/facts/. For more information, call Julie Goplin, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2378.

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