

Deer Mouse and Hantavirus



Deer Mouse

Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS) is a deadly disease. Rodents can transmit hantaviruses through urine, droppings or saliva. Humans can contract the disease when they breathe in aerosolized virus. The primary cause of hantavirus in the United States is the deer mouse. It is the only carrier found in the Pacific Northwest. Most mice found in urban areas and buildings in the Pacific Northwest are house mice and do not carry hantavirus. The deer mouse is present but generally found in rural settings. It is best to treat all rodents as a potential threat.

Any activity that puts you in contact with rodent droppings, urine, saliva or nesting materials can put you at risk. Hantavirus is spread when virus-containing particles from rodent urine, droppings or saliva are stirred into the air. Examples are opening or cleaning cabins, sheds, barns, garages and storage facilities that have been closed for the winter, especially in rural settings. It is important to avoid actions that raise dust, such as sweeping or vacuuming.

If cleaning a rodent-infested area wear rubber, latex or vinyl gloves. Do not stir up the dust and wear a mask. Thoroughly wet contaminated areas with a bleach solution. Use one cup of bleach to each gallon of water. Spray dead rodents with a bleach solution and place in a tight plastic bag before disposing in outside garbage. Thoroughly wash your hands and any contaminated clothing in soap and hot water.

You can not get hantavirus from another person or from other animals, such as dogs or cats. You can not get it from insects, such as mosquitoes. It only comes from rodents.

Preventing hantavirus means preventing rodents. Seal up rodent entry holes with steel wool or caulking material. Clean up food sources and nesting sites. This is particularly important for buildings in rural settings that may be vacant over long periods of time, such as summer cabins. Old-fashioned snap traps remain the best means of eliminating live rodents inside – but remember to use gloves when handling dead rodents or cleaning an infested area.



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