



Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome

What is hantavirus pulmonary syndrome?

Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS) is a somewhat rare, but deadly disease caused by some types of hantaviruses.

How are hantaviruses spread?

Rodents like deer mice, white-footed mice, cotton and rice rats carry hantaviruses. These rodents spread the virus through urine, droppings or saliva. When these materials dry and then are disturbed, the virus becomes airborne. People may be infected with the hantaviruses after breathing these particles. If a rodent with the virus bites someone, the virus may spread to that person, but this is rare.

What are the symptoms of HPS?

People with HPS may have fever, severe muscle aches and fatigue. These symptoms are usually followed by shortness of breath. Some people may have headaches, nausea and vomiting and coughing. Symptoms typically appear one to five weeks after infection. HPS can progress toward serious complications.

How is HPS or other hantavirus diseases diagnosed ?

Health care providers can perform blood tests to detect the viruses.

How is HPS treated?

People diagnosed with HPS will require breathing treatments, fluids and medications to prevent shock.

What can be done to help prevent the spread of hantaviral diseases?

- Keep home and work environment free of rodents.
- Seal any possible rodent entrances.
- Place trash in containers with tight fitting lids.
- Store human and animal food in rodent-proof containers.
- For outdoor pets, remove uneaten food after 15 minutes and put water away at night.
- Spray a diluted bleach solution on surfaces where rodents have been, then clean the area wearing a mask and gloves. Do not sweep or vacuum; use a wet mop or moist towels.
- Trap and dispose of rodents properly (place rodent in plastic bag, seal bag, put into a second bag and seal it, place in garbage container that is emptied regularly).

Can hantaviruses be used as a bioterrorist weapon?

Yes. Because they can be inhaled, hantaviruses have the potential to affect large numbers of people if released in a highly populated, enclosed area.

For more information, call the Guilford County Department of Public Health at 336-641-7777, visit our website at www.myguilford.com or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov