

# Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) Fact Sheet

## **Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) is a respiratory illness caused by a virus that is carried by rodents (mice and rats)**

In the United States, the deer mouse (*Peromyscus maniculatus*), the cotton rat (*Sigmodon hispidus*), the rice rat (*Oryzomys palustris*) in the Southeast, and the white-footed mouse (*Peromyscus leucopus*) in the Northeast are the rodents that carry hantaviruses that cause HPS. Other rodents that carry strains of hantavirus that cause HPS have yet to be identified.

## **HPS is a rare disease and most people are NOT at risk for Hantavirus infection**

You can catch HPS by direct contact with infected rodents or rodent droppings (which look like black grains of rice), or by breathing in dust that contains infected rodent droppings, urine, or saliva. A rodent bite may also spread the virus. Person-to-person spread of hantaviruses has not occurred in the United States. The virus is able to live in dirt and dust for some time. People may be exposed when they spend time outdoors, or when rodents are inside houses and outbuildings (such as sheds, cabins, or barns).

## **Any activity where you directly touch rodents or their droppings, urine, saliva, or nesting materials (twigs, insulation, shredded paper, grass) and/or stir up dust in rodent-contaminated places may put you at risk for HPS**

- Sweeping, cleaning, and vacuuming closed up rooms, cabins, warehouses, sheds, barns, garages, and outbuildings that have been closed during the winter and may be infested with rodents
- Going into crawl spaces under rodent infested houses
- Camping and hiking

## **Symptoms may appear from a few days up to 6 weeks after exposure**

Most people with HPS will have early symptoms much like those of the flu: fever (101 to 104°F), tiredness, muscle aches, headaches, dizziness, chills, and stomach problems (nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and pain). Later symptoms are coughing and difficulty breathing, which are caused by fluid buildup in the lungs. These symptoms may last a few hours to several days. HPS can result in death.

## **You can prevent HPS**

### **1) Do not make buildings attractive to rodents**

- Keep all eating, cooking, and food storage areas clean.
- Put all food, water, and garbage in metal or thick plastic containers with tight fitting lids. Never leave pet food and water out overnight.
- Get rid of trash and clutter, such as junk cars, old tires, wood, and trash piles.
- Keep garbage off the ground.
- Clear brush and trash from around homes and outbuildings.

### **2) Control rodent populations by keeping snap traps and/or using chemicals (rodenticides) to rid the area of rodents**

### **3) Safely clean up rodent-infested areas**

- Air out rodent infested places at least 30 minutes BEFORE cleanup.
- Spray or wet down all areas found with droppings, nesting, and other materials with a household disinfectant, or with a bleach solution (using 1½ cups of household bleach per gallon of water).
- DO NOT sweep, vacuum, or stir up dust until the area is thoroughly wet with disinfectant.
- Wear rubber gloves; wash gloves in disinfectant before removing; and WASH HANDS afterwards.

### **4) Avoid rodents when outdoors**

- Do not disturb rodent droppings or camp or sleep near burrows or areas where trash is present.
- Avoid sleeping on bare ground (use a mat or off the ground cots).
- Do not sleep near woodpiles or garbage/trash areas.