

# MEDfacts

An Educational Health Series From National Jewish Health®



## Hantavirus

### What is Hantavirus?

Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS) is a serious disease that affects breathing, muscles, and energy. It can be fatal.

### Who is likely to get HPS?

People who live or work in rural or semi-rural settings or who frequent similar settings (cabins, etc.) where they may have contact with deer mice and other wild rodents are more likely to get HPS.

### How do humans get HPS from animals?

Hantavirus is an infection carried by certain wild rodents, mainly deer mice. It is passed to humans the following ways:

- Breathing in air contaminated with tiny particles of rodent urine, droppings or nesting materials,
- Touching rodent urine, droppings or nesting materials,
- Eating food contaminated with urine, droppings or nesting materials and
- Getting bitten by an infected rodent (this is rare).

### You CANNOT get Hantavirus from:

- Another person,
- Farm animals,
- Mosquitoes,
- Dogs or cats and
- Guinea pigs, hamsters, gerbils, or other pet store rodents.

### What are the symptoms?

After exposure, symptoms may not appear for one to five weeks.

Early symptoms always include:

- Fever,
- Muscle aches in large muscle groups (back, hip, shoulder, thigh),

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- Nausea/Vomiting and
- Cough.

Sometimes symptoms include:

- Dizziness,
- Joint aches,
- Shortness of breath (late in the course of the disease) and
- Rarely sore throat and runny nose.

After 10 days, symptoms include:

- Shortness of breath with the sensation of tightness in the chest and difficulty breathing.

Tell your doctor if you may have been exposed to deer mice and you have these symptoms.

### What is the treatment?

Currently there is no effective antiviral medicine for HPS. When Hantavirus is suspected or confirmed, you need to be admitted to the hospital as soon as possible to be treated and monitored.

### How can it be prevented?

- Eliminate or reduce contact with rodents in your house, work or campsite.
  - Seal up holes and gaps in your home or garage.
  - Place traps around or in dwellings that may be rodent infested.
  - Clean up food that would be easy for rodents to access (even pet food).
- Keep your kitchen clean (don't leave dirty dishes out, clean the counters. Keep food covered and put away in tight containers, sweep and mop the floor regularly.
- Tightly lid your trash cans.
- Place traps along baseboards and in tight places.
- Avoid areas showing signs of rodents.
- Avoid actions in rodent areas that raise dust—carefully wet the area with disinfectant to reduce the chance that the virus will get into the air.
- Eliminated nesting material sources around the outside of your home (brush, grass, junk).
- Use 12 inch metal flashing around the base of wooden, earth, or adobe homes.
- Move trash, woodpiles, and hay stacks 100 feet.
- Wear a protective mask and rubber gloves when cleaning areas that are infested with rodents.
- When going into cabins, outbuildings, or work areas that have been closed for awhile, open them up and air them out before cleaning.
- Spray water or a 10% bleach solution on the area to be cleaned prior to sweeping.

For further information: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

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