



Hantavirus Alert - Spring Cleaning Season- Watch for Rodents

Date: April 20, 2026

As snow storms linger into late April, we all are looking forward to the warmer summer days. Unfortunately, that can mean cleaning up after critters that found winter lodging in our cabins and sheds. It's important we don't expose ourselves to illness from them when opening up for spring. Farmers, cabin owners, gardeners and other community members including homeowners, cottagers, campers, farmers, maintenance workers, ranchers and hunters will soon be going in to buildings (including cabins and sheds), or wood piles that have not been used since the fall. We will all need to be aware that urine, saliva and droppings from infected rodents like deer mice can contain Hantavirus.

Hantavirus is a rare but serious disease that is spread through rodent urine, saliva, or feces. In Saskatchewan, there have been between 0 and 4 cases reported each year with about a third of the cases resulting in death.

Exposure to rodent saliva, urine or feces can lead to Hantavirus infection. This is usually caused by inhaling dust contaminated by these rodent products, especially in a closed or poorly ventilated space. This inhalation typically occurs while cleaning out buildings, vehicles or other contaminated spaces. Contaminated dust is easily stirred up inside sheds, cabins, grain bins, wood piles, vehicles and garages. The virus does not remain active for long once outside of its host -- less than 1 week outdoors and a few hours when exposed to direct sunlight. **Hantavirus is not spread from person to person or from pets to humans; it can only be spread by direct inhalation of contaminated dusts that contain the virus.**

While Hantavirus illness is unusual, people who do get sick may have flu-like symptoms and sometimes nausea and vomiting. In rare cases, people may develop a severe lung infection known as Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome.

Dr. Ndubuka who is the Medical Health Officer for NITHA advises First Nations communities to take precautionary measures to avoid exposure and possible resulting illness.

Precautionary measures that can be taken to protect against the risk of Hantavirus include:

- Aerate any potentially affected areas by allowing them to air out for at least 30 minutes before entering. Do not use fans or vacuums as making the virus airborne can cause illness.
- **NOTE:** If the area has no doors or windows for ventilation – call in professionals with the appropriate breathing apparatus and tools for remediation.



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THIRD LEVEL HEALTH SERVICES

- Wear personal protective equipment such as filter mask, eye goggles and plastic or rubber gloves when cleaning or coming into contact with dusts and surfaces that may have been contaminated by mice saliva, urine or feces.
- Spray rodent droppings with a 10% solution of bleach (1 part bleach to 9 parts water), and all potentially contaminated surfaces should also be sprayed with bleach.
- Remove food sources and hiding places for mice.
- Contact your health care centre or provider if you think you have been recently exposed to mice or rodent droppings or experienced similar symptoms following spring clean-up activities.
- Contact your Environmental Health Officer for further information about Hantavirus and how you can prevent the risk of infection.

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References:

Public Health Agency of Canada
Fact Sheet – Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) available at <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/id-mi/vhf-fvh/hantavirus-eng.php>

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety
Hantavirus – available at <http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/diseases/hantavir.html>



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HANTAVIRUS DISEASE



1. Virus found in rodent feces

2. Infected feces becomes airborne



3. Inhaled by humans

Symptoms: Early: Chills, fever, muscle aches. Later, 1-2 days: Dry cough, headache, nausea, vomiting, shortness of breath.

Risk Groups:

- Anyone cleaning (sweeping or vacuuming) poorly ventilated areas (e.g. cabins, sheds) with deer mouse feces, dried urine or nests.
- Anyone in close contact with deer mouse feces, dried urine or nests in poorly ventilated areas.
- Anyone handling firewood, if wood piles are contaminated with deer mouse feces, urine or nests.

5. Acute respiratory distress; serious infection that quickly worsens



WHAT IS HANTAVIRUS DISEASE?



Hantavirus is a rare but serious illness spread by deer mice. Hantaviruses are a group of viruses that can cause severe illness in humans. In Canada, hantavirus pulmonary syndrome is spread by rodents including deer mice, white-footed mice and red-backed voles. Infections are most common in the spring when people clean buildings left vacant during the fall and winter.

Prevention

Keep your home, workplace, cabin or campsite rodent-free. All rodent droppings are potentially harmful. You should:

- block openings that might let rodents in
- store food, water and garbage in containers with tightly fitted lids
- place mousetraps throughout buildings
- keep your yard clean
- stack woodpiles away from buildings



Transmission

People can become infected with hantavirus when they:

- are in close contact with deer mouse feces, dried urine or nests in poorly ventilated areas.
- inhale virus particles from rodent urine, droppings or saliva that have been released into the air when rodent waste is stirred up from vacuuming or sweeping.
- touch objects or eat food contaminated with the urine, droppings or saliva of infected rodents or are bitten by a rodent infected with hantavirus.



Symptoms

The initial symptoms of the disease may appear from one to six weeks after the exposure, with an average of two to three weeks. Once symptoms appear, the disease can progress rapidly and become life-threatening within a short time.

Early: Chills, Fever, Muscle aches

Later, 1-2 days: Dry cough, headache, nausea, vomiting, shortness of breath



Guidance

To properly clean and disinfect rodent droppings safely:

- Ventilate the area by opening doors and windows for 30 minutes.
- Do not sweep or vacuum droppings to avoid airborne particles.
- Wear rubber/plastic gloves and, in confined spaces, wear a HEPA-filtered respirator (e.g., KN-95 mask).
- Spray droppings with a 1 part bleach to 9 parts water mixture. Let the area soak for 10 minutes.
- Use paper towels or a wet mop to remove the droppings.
- Wash gloves in disinfectant and hot soapy water before removing them. Then wash your hands thoroughly.
- Clean the wet mop with disinfectant and hot soapy water after use.



WARNING: If the area cannot be ventilated for 30 minutes with open doors or windows, hire a professional with proper protective equipment and training.

NOTE: Persons who develop a fever or respiratory illness within 45 days of the last potential exposure should immediately seek medical attention and inform the attending nurse/physician of the potential risk of hantavirus infection.