

# Hantavirus

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## What is Hantavirus?

Hantavirus is a disease that is caused by a virus and affects the lungs. It is spread to people by infected rodents, especially the deer mouse. Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS) is a complication that can result from being infected by hantavirus and it is fatal about 50% of the time. Currently there is no cure or vaccine for HPS.

## Hantavirus facts

The virus can be found in the feces, urine or saliva of infected rodents. People usually get HPS by breathing in air that contains dried particles of infected urine, feces and saliva. This usually happens when people are cleaning, camping, doing repair work or other activities that might disturb areas where rodents live and nest. HPS mainly occurs in the western United States, but has been found throughout the United States. The rodents that carry HPS usually live in rural areas. Infected rodents are not affected by the virus. HPS is not known to be spread from one person to another. Pets and livestock do not appear to get sick or spread the virus.

## Symptoms

- Symptoms usually appear 2-3 weeks (can range from a few days to 6 weeks) after exposure to infected rodents or their droppings.
- Initial symptoms include fever, chills, headache and severe muscle pains (especially in the legs and lower back).
- Initial symptoms progress into a dry cough, shortness of breath and difficulty breathing. Fluid begins to build up in the lungs and can lead to respiratory failure and death.
- If you experience these symptoms combined with difficulty breathing and have been in a rodent-infested area, see your health care provider immediately. Be sure to mention any exposure to rodents – especially deer mice.

### Take the following steps to keep rodents away from your home:

1. Seal all exterior cracks and holes larger than a dime (1/4 inch).
2. Keep grass cut short and trim or remove bushes, shrubs and other vegetation from around buildings.
3. Remove trash and junk piles from your yard.
4. Store food in plastic, rodent-proof containers.
5. Do not leave pet food out overnight.
6. Clean up any spilled seed from birdfeeders.

## Prevention

The best way to prevent HPS is to keep rodents away from your home and to avoid rodents when you visit wilderness areas.

- Make sure rodents cannot get into your home and keep areas in and around your home clean and neat.
- Be sure rodents cannot find a food source near your home or campground.
- Use traps with peanut butter as bait to decrease current rodent populations in your home or contact a pest control service.

When cleaning areas where rodents are present, take the following precautions:

- Open all doors and windows for at least one half an hour before entering the building.
- Soak the rodent-infested area for five to ten minutes with a disinfectant solution of one cup bleach to one gallon water. Then mop up or WET vacuum the area. Be sure to wear rubber gloves and wash your hands well after you are done cleaning.
- **NEVER** sweep or dry vacuum in rodent-infested areas.

## Treatment for Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome

Currently, there is no treatment for HPS. Early diagnosis can help doctors to treat symptoms.



Eleven offices serving the residents of Adams, Arapahoe and Douglas Counties  
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