

Hantavirus:

Protecting yourself & your family



C. Deer

Hantavirus infection is a rare but serious life-threatening illness. It is believed to be caused by breathing in the virus carried by airborne particles of rodent urine, droppings or saliva. The disease does not cause illness in pets and it cannot be passed from person to person, or from pets to people.

The best protection against the virus is to prevent all rodents from entering your home or cabin, and to carefully clean and disinfect where they have been.

The primary carrier of Hantavirus is the deer mouse, but it is possible that other rodents may sometimes carry the virus.

If a person is infected, the disease will generally appear within four or five days. Early symptoms resemble those of the flu, including a fever of 38° to 40°C (101 to 104F), body aches, and chills.

Hantavirus progresses from these symptoms to severe difficulty in breathing. Medical attention is required.

Who is at risk?

- ▶ **Families living in houses with rodents or who move into a home where rodents were living.**
- ▶ **Hunters and trappers who use wilderness cabins seasonally.** Rodents may build nests in vacant cabins.
- ▶ **Campers and hikers.** While rodents are virtually everywhere in the wilderness, campers and hikers can take precautions by avoiding burrows, dens and woodpiles where rodents might live and other areas with conspicuous droppings.
- ▶ **Individuals who clean barns, plus electricians, plumbers or others who work in crawl spaces.** Breathing protection should be used when entering areas where rodents have been. A cloth or painter's mask is better than nothing, but a proper filter mask is recommended. Wear protective clothing, gloves and boots/coverings that can be disinfected (washed) or thrown away.

How to protect yourself:

- ▶ Clean up all food and eating areas immediately after meals/snacks and store food in rodent-proof containers.
- ▶ Rodent nests should be soaked with a bleach solution and removed completely. Mop dirty areas with a bleach solution rather than dry sweeping because sweeping raises dust and increases the possibility of exposure.
- ▶ Secure your home or camp to ensure rodents can't get in to begin with.
- ▶ Use tents with floors or use ground-sheets under sleeping bags. Use only bottled, boiled, filtered or chemically-treated water. Safely store or properly dispose of all garbage.
- ▶ Ensure the area around your home or cabin is cleared of brush, and keep trash in rodent-proof containers or at least 100 feet away. Do not leave pet food, water or food dishes out overnight.

Deer mice occur throughout the southern and central Yukon and are very common in a wide variety of dry habitats. Their presence in dwellings peaks in late August and early September after frosts.

For more information on deer mice: Contact the Biodiversity Biologist at Environment Yukon at (867) 667-5766 or search 'deer mouse' on www.env.gov.yk.ca.

For more information on Hantavirus: Contact your community health centre or search 'Hantavirus' on www.hss.gov.yk.ca

If you think you may have Hantavirus:
Contact your health care provider.