



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Texas Department of State
Health Services

Hantavirus

Hantavirus is an infectious disease that can cause death. It is spread to people by rodents, such as rats and mice. The question-and-answer sections presented below contain information about hantavirus and how to prevent it. Following these tips will help reduce your risk of getting this disease.



Q. When was hantavirus detected in the United States?

A. Hantavirus was first detected in the United States in 1993. At that time, cases were occurring in the Four Corners area of the Southwest (the point where Colorado, Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico meet). The first case of hantavirus in Texas was also reported in 1993.

Q. What are the clinical signs and symptoms of hantavirus infection?

A. Early signs and symptoms of hantavirus infection almost always include fever, fatigue, and muscle aches, particularly of the large muscles of the thighs, hips, and back, and usually occur 1-8 weeks after exposure. Other early signs and symptoms may include headache, joint pain, dizziness, chills, abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. The more severe, life-threatening signs and symptoms of hantavirus pulmonary* syndrome (HPS) may develop 4-10 days after the onset of illness and include coughing, shortness of breath, and rapid breathing. This stage usually progresses rapidly (often within 24 hours) to severe respiratory distress, requiring hospitalization and ventilation (support with breathing).

*relating to the lungs

Q. How can I get infected with hantavirus?

A. Some rodents can carry hantaviruses and are never sick. They may pass the virus in their droppings (feces), urine, and saliva. From here, the virus can spread in the air on dust particles and you can then inhale them. You can also be infected if you touch your nose, eyes, or mouth after handling items (for example, tools or clothing) that have the virus on them.

Things you do may increase your possibility of contact with the virus. These include cleaning barns, cabins, hunting blinds, or sheds and having outdoor hobbies, such as camping, hiking, or hunting.

Q. Can I get this disease from a pet?

A. There have been no known cases in the United States in which the virus was spread from pets or livestock to people.

Q. What do I do if I think I have hantavirus infection?

A. Always see a physician if you have sudden and severe shortness of breath. Also call a physician if you have febrile illness after contact with rodents or their wastes. Be sure to tell the physician about the type of contact you had. Reported cases of hantavirus infection are rare in Texas.



Q. Is there any treatment for hantavirus infection?

A. Patients with hantavirus can receive relief through supportive treatment. Antibiotics will not cure a hantavirus infection.

Rodent Control and Disposal**Q. What kind of animals carry hantavirus?**

A. Only certain rodents (such as rats and mice) are known to carry hantavirus. Rodents from pet stores are not associated with spreading hantavirus in the United States.

Q. Since rodents are usually active at night, how will I know if I have them in my home or business?

A. Even if you do not see rodents, you will know they are present by seeing their droppings (which look like black grains of rice), trails, rub and gnaw marks, tracks, or nests. Rodent nests are made of various materials, such as twigs, grass, insulation, and newspaper.

If you need help with rodent control, contact a pest management professional. If you have a large number of rodents inside a building, special respiratory-protection gear may be needed while trying to dispose of them and their wastes.

Q. How can I prevent having rodent problems?

A. Remove the three things rodents need to survive: food, water, and shelter.

- Keep food in a refrigerator or in sealed containers.
- Wash dishes and remove spilled food.
- Place garbage in a can with a tight-fitting lid.
- Do not leave food for animals in feeding dishes overnight.
- Promptly dispose of trash and clutter.

- Seal or screen all openings to the house. Use caulk to seal cracks and steel wool or metal screen to close larger holes.
- Keep lumber and firewood stored outdoors on racks, not on the ground.

Q. What can I do if I find dead rodents or their nests, droppings, or urine?

A. To dispose of rodents and their wastes, follow these steps:

- Before cleaning, spray the area with an insecticide that kills fleas. Also treat your pets for fleas. Be sure to follow label directions. Fleas may feed on the blood of rodents. When this source of blood is gone, the fleas may feed on other sources of blood, like humans. No facts suggest that fleas can give you hantavirus. However, they can give you diseases such as typhus and plague.
- Set spring-loaded (snap) traps. Place traps where children and pets cannot reach them.
- Open doors and windows to allow fresh air to enter the area and to remove air that might contain the virus. Leave them open for 30 minutes before cleaning; leave the area during this time.
- Wear a dust mask when cleaning but be aware that although it might provide some protection against dust, molds, and insulation fibers, it won't protect against viruses.
- Do not sweep or vacuum rodent wastes or nests as this might spread the virus in the air.
- Do not touch the rodent or its wastes with your bare hands. Wear waterproof gloves (such as latex, rubber, or vinyl).
- After the rodent has been trapped and killed, spray disinfectant (for example, bleach mixed according to label directions or a disinfectant labeled for hantavirus) on the dead rodent and its nest, droppings, and urine. Let it soak for at least 5 minutes (longer if recommended in label directions). Use a paper towel dampened with disinfectant to wipe up rodent urine or droppings.



- Place the rodent and other materials in a plastic bag, including items used in the cleanup process, such as paper towels. Tie or “zip lock” the bag and place it in another bag. Dispose of this bag in a covered outdoor garbage can.
- Use disinfectant on the surface where the rodent or rodent waste was found.
- Spray disinfectant on the gloves before taking them off. Wash your hands with soap and water after removing your gloves.

