

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**04/24/2019**

TO: Grant County Providers and Media

FOR INFORMATION CONTACTCassandra Kelly, Public Information Officer
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Phone: 509-766-7960 ext. 14**Spring Cleaning?****GCHD Reminds Residents to Protect Themselves from Hantavirus**

Grant County – With Spring in full force, GCHD wants to remind residents and visitors to be aware of the risks of hantavirus and to take precautions to avoid exposure to rodents, their droppings and their nests, especially during “Spring cleaning” of areas with possible rodent infestation that have been closed up over the winter months.

Washington is the 5th leading state for Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) cases and even though cases have occurred throughout our state, most cases have been reported from counties in central Washington. There have been 3 cases of HPS in Grant County during the last 10 years, 2 of which were fatal. The most recent case was reported in 2018; this patient, who survived, was likely exposed while cleaning out a vehicle with rodent infestation.

What is Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome?

Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) is a rare illness caused by a virus found in the urine, droppings and saliva of infected rodents. In Washington State, deer mice are the only carriers of the virus. Because deer mice are present throughout Grant County, the risk of hantavirus is also county-wide.



A person can get HPS by breathing in hantavirus when dust from dried rodent urine, saliva, and droppings that contain the virus is stirred up in the air. People can also get infected through direct contact with infected deer mice or by touching rodent urine, droppings, or nesting materials that contain the virus, and then touching their eyes, nose, or mouth. *The disease does not spread person-to-person.* **The greatest risk occurs when people enter enclosed areas with rodent infestation and poor air circulation, such as sheds and other outbuildings, cabins, building crawl spaces, vehicles and R.Vs.**

What are the symptoms of HPS?

HPS illness usually begins one to six weeks after a person breathes in the virus. Early signs include fever, muscle aches, headaches, dizziness, chills, nausea, vomiting. As the disease gets worse, it causes coughing and shortness of breath and can lead to respiratory failure. People with hantavirus are usually hospitalized, and about one out of three people diagnosed with HPS have died. **If you have been exposed to rodents or rodent infested buildings and have symptoms, see your doctor immediately and tell them about your possible rodent exposure.**

How can HPS be prevented?

You can prevent HPS by avoiding wild rodents and keeping them out of the places you live, work and play. Remove their sources of food, water, and shelter and keep these areas rodent-proofed. Seal up cracks and gaps in buildings that are larger than ¼ inch, including window and door sills, under sinks around the pipes, in foundations, attics, and any rodent entry hole.

If you encounter an area with known or suspected rodent infestation, it's important to take precautions, especially when entering enclosed spaces where rodents have been.

- Before entering, “air-out” the space by opening multiple doors and windows for at least 30 minutes to allow fresh air to circulate. Leave the area while it is airing out.
- Wear rubber or plastic gloves. A dust mask may provide some protection against dust, molds, and insulation fibers, but does not protect against viruses. A properly fitted N-95 mask will offer better protection.
- Do **not** vacuum, sweep, or otherwise stir up dust.
- Thoroughly spray contaminated areas including dead mice, droppings, and nests with a 1-to-10-part mixture of bleach and water. Soak area for 10 minutes, then remove all the nest material, mice or droppings with damp paper towels, and place all the material, including the paper towels, into a sealed plastic bag and into an outdoor garbage receptacle. Mop or sponge the area with bleach solution.
- Wash gloves with disinfectant or soap and water before taking them off. Remove the gloves, then wash hands with soap and water.
- Steam clean or shampoo upholstered furniture, carpets and car interiors, and wash any bedding or clothing in hot water if you see any rodent urine or droppings on them.
- Areas with heavy infestation (piled up droppings, numerous nests and dead rodents) require extra precaution. Professional cleaning and/or pest control services may be needed.

How can people stay safe while hiking, camping and enjoying the outdoors?

- Do not handle or feed wild rodents!
- Air out cabins and shelters, then check for signs of rodents. Do not sweep out infested cabins or shake out rugs. Instead, follow the steps above for cabins or shelters before sleeping in them.
- Do not pitch tents or place sleeping bags near rodent droppings or burrows.
- If possible, do not sleep on the bare ground. Use tents with floors or a ground cloth.
- Keep food in thick plastic or metal containers with tight-fitting lids!
- Handle trash according to site restrictions and keep it in rodent-proof containers

Additional Information:

[Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome \(HPS\)](#)- Center for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC)

[What is Hantavirus?](#) – Washington State Department of Health

[Hantavirus](#)- Grant County Health District

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