

News from the Wyoming Department of Health

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Watch for Signs of Rodents to Help Prevent Hantavirus Infection

Wyoming residents cleaning garages, campers, cabins, hay stacks and barns should be aware that rodent droppings can signal the need to avoid hantavirus infection, according to the Wyoming Department of Health.

“Hantavirus is uncommon, but is a dangerous and potentially deadly disease,” said Dr. Tracy Murphy, state epidemiologist with the Wyoming Department of Health. Nine HPS cases have been reported in Wyoming since 2000. A case last year in Carbon County resulted in death, as well as two unrelated cases in 2008.

Murphy said infected rodents shed the virus through urine, droppings and saliva. Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome is transmitted to humans when they breathe infectious aerosols created when dried materials contaminated by rodent urine and feces or saliva are disturbed. Infection is also possible when the virus is directly introduced into broken skin or mucous membranes, if it is ingested or after rodent bites.

Murphy said rodent infestation in and around the home and in outbuildings such as barns remains the primary risk for hantavirus exposure. Recommended guidelines for safe and proper cleanup of rodent-infested areas include:

- During cleaning, wear rubber, latex, vinyl, or nitrile gloves.
- Spray rodent urine and droppings with a disinfectant or bleach solution until thoroughly soaked. The bleach solution can be made by combining 1 ½ cups of household bleach with 1 gallon of water.
- To avoid generating potentially infectious aerosols, do not vacuum or sweep rodent urine, droppings, nesting materials or contaminated surfaces until they have been disinfected.
- Use a paper towel (while wearing gloves) to pick up the urine and droppings. Place the paper towel in the garbage.
- After the rodent droppings and urine have been removed, disinfect items that might have been contaminated by rodents or their urine and droppings:

--- Mop floors with a disinfectant or bleach solution.

--- Disinfect countertops, cabinets, drawers and other durable surfaces with a disinfectant or bleach solution.

--- Spray dirt floors with a disinfectant or bleach solution.

--- Disinfect carpets with a disinfectant or with a commercial-grade steam cleaner or shampoo.

--- Steam-clean or shampoo rugs and upholstered furniture.

--- Launder potentially contaminated bedding and clothing with hot water and detergent.

Use rubber, latex, vinyl or nitrile gloves when handling contaminated laundry. Machine-

dry laundry on a high setting or hang it to air dry in the sun.

--- Leave books, papers and other items that cannot be cleaned with a liquid disinfectant or thrown away outdoors in the sunlight for several hours, or in an indoor area free of rodents for approximately one week before cleanup. After that time, the virus should no longer be infectious. Wear rubber, latex, vinyl or nitrile gloves and wipe the items with a cloth moistened with disinfectant.

--- Disinfect gloves before removing them with disinfectant or soap and water. After removing the gloves, thoroughly wash bare hands with soap and warm water.

In especially dirty, dusty or rodent-infested environments, extra protective clothing or equipment should be worn such as coveralls, shoe covers and special face masks known as respirators. If a building has been closed and unoccupied for a long time, doors and windows should be opened for ventilation at least 30 minutes before work begins.

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