

Tool Box Talk

Hantavirus Safety

What is Hantavirus?

Hantaviruses are a group of viruses that can cause severe illness in humans. People can become infected with a hantavirus when they:

- Inhale virus particles from rodent urine, droppings or saliva that have been released into the air. This can happen when rodent waste is stirred up from vacuuming or sweeping.
- Touch objects or eat food contaminated with the urine, droppings or saliva of infected rodents.
- Have been bitten by a rodent infected with a hantavirus (this is rare).



Facts on Hantavirus

- With the exception of the Andes hantavirus, the virus does not spread through person-to-person contact.
- About 200 cases of hantavirus pulmonary syndrome occur each year, primarily in North and South America. The average case fatality rate is 40%.
- Since 1989, there have been 143 confirmed cases and 27 deaths in Canada due to a hantavirus infection.
- There are no vaccines available to prevent a hantavirus infection.
- The virus does not remain active for long once outside of its host – less than 1 week outdoors and a few hours when exposed to direct sunlight.
- The National Microbiology Laboratory is the only laboratory in Canada that:
 - conducts diagnostic testing for Hantavirus infections in humans
 - analyzes trends in Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome cases in Canada
 - carries out field investigations into hantavirus infection cases across Canada

Prevention

Health officials typically remind residents about the risk of hantavirus in the spring in areas potentially infested by rodents. People are most often exposed when cleaning up

enclosed buildings (such as grain bins, sheds, barns, garages, trailers, cottages and homes) or farm equipment and vehicles after winter. It's important to keep homes, workplaces, cottages and campsites rodent-free. All rodent droppings are potentially harmful. Remember to:

- Block openings that might let in rodents
- Store food, water and garbage in containers with tight lids
- Place mousetraps throughout buildings
- Keep your yard clean
- Stack woodpiles away from buildings

To properly clean and disinfect areas contaminated by rodent droppings, follow the steps below.

- Ventilate the building by opening doors and windows for at least 30 minutes before cleaning.
- Wear rubber or plastic gloves. If cleaning in a confined space, wear a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filtered respirator and goggles.
- Do not sweep or vacuum rodent droppings. This will release particles into the air, which could be inhaled.
- Spray droppings with a household disinfectant or a mixture of 1 part bleach to 9 parts water. Let the area soak for 10 minutes to make sure any virus within the droppings will be killed.
- Wipe up wet droppings with paper towels or a wet mop if dealing with a large area.
- Wash gloves in disinfectant and hot soapy water before taking them off. Afterward, wash your hands thoroughly.

Who's at Risk?

People at greatest risk for hantavirus infection are those who come into contact with environments contaminated by infected rodents. This includes:

- People cleaning or disturbing rodent-infested spaces (vacant buildings, garages, attics, woodpiles) without proper protection. Inhalation of aerosolized virus from urine, droppings or nesting materials is the main transmission route.
- Workers in construction, utility, pest control or agriculture who may disturb rodent habitats.