



Pueblo City-County Health Department

NEWS

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For Immediate Release

Two Deaths from Hantavirus in Southern Colorado

Pueblo- Two cases of Hantavirus, which has resulted in the deaths of a Costilla County and a Custer County individual, have been confirmed by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's Laboratory.

An investigation is being conducted to determine how the fatalities were infected. The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment and the Costilla, Custer and Pueblo City-County Health Departments are working together to make this determination.

"People need to be particularly careful when there is evidence of an active mouse infestation such as the presence of mouse droppings or nests, damage caused by mice or live mice being seen in and around the buildings or nearby wood or junk piles," stated Dr. Christine Nevin-Woods, executive director of the Pueblo City-County Health Department.

Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome is a respiratory disease caused by a virus that is most commonly carried by the deer mouse. Adult deer mice have a white underbelly and throat with brown or tan fur, while young deer mice are colored gray above the white underparts. The ears are large, round, and mostly hairless. The virus can infect humans when they inhale dirt and dust contaminated with deer mice urine and feces. This can occur when people have contact with infected mice or stir up dust while working in or cleaning out rodent-infested structures such as barns; garages; storage sheds; trailers or cabins.

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John Pape, an epidemiologist specializing in animal-related diseases at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, said, "As people begin cleaning out barns, garages, storage buildings, trailers or cabins that have been closed up all winter, they need to take precautions before beginning such work, particularly if there are signs of mice."

Pape said, "If you look around and are seeing deer mice or have noticed an increase in the mouse population, you need to do some rodent proofing and control. There are four steps to hantavirus prevention: rodent-proof homes and buildings to keep mice out; eliminate rodent hiding places and food supplies; conduct rodent control; and when cleaning rodent-infested structures, use special precautions."

Pape noted that recent heavy rains have resulted in increased vegetation in rural parts of the state. As a result of increasing vegetation growth, there is an increased food supply for rodents, which can lead to an increase in mouse populations.

Pape emphasized that just vacuuming an area without first wetting it down will not provide the necessary protection.

He provided the following precautions that should be taken to provide protection against hantavirus:

- Before cleaning out rodent-infested structures, open doors or windows to provide good ventilation for 30-to-60 minutes. In order to avoid stirring up dust spray mouse droppings, nest materials and carcasses with a mixture of bleach and water. A bleach mixture of one cup of bleach per gallon of water is recommended.
- Thoroughly soak down potentially contaminated areas with the bleach mixture.
- Use rubber gloves to pick up saturated waste, including nesting materials or dead mice. Double bag the waste using plastic bags, and bury or dispose of it in an outdoor garbage can or landfill.
- **In cases of severe infestation, or when ventilation and dust suppression are not possible, use a rubber face mask equipped with a High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filter, which can be purchased from safety equipment supply stores.**
- Seal any holes or openings larger than ¼ inch to prevent mice from entering a building.
- Store food, including pet food and livestock feed, and garbage in rodent-proof containers. Rodent populations are determined by the availability of food sources so just eliminating food supplies will reduce the number of mice.
- Remove rodent hiding places such as wood, junk and brush piles. Store firewood at least 100 feet from the house. Keep bushes and vegetation around structures well trimmed and grass cut short.
- In rural areas or structures with mice infestations, rodent control, using traps and poisons, should be conducted on a year round basis.

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- When camping, avoid sleeping on bare ground. Instead, use tents with floors or cots.

Colorado residents can call the Department of Public Health and Environment's Disease Control and Environmental Epidemiology Division at (303) 692-2700 to receive a brochure on Hantavirus. Answers to frequently asked questions about Hantavirus can also be found on the department's Web page at www.cdphe.state.co.us/dc/zoonosis/hanta/hantafaq.html or toll-free at the CO-HELP at 1-877-462-2911.

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