

First case of Hantavirus detected in McKinley County

Written by gallupsun

Wednesday, 21 April 2021 17:28



The person in McKinley County who contracted the first case of Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome this year is in “stable condition” at a hospital in Albuquerque, a spokesman for the Navajo Department of Health said.

The news on Wednesday night follows an announcement about the case made on April 19 by the Nation.

Del Yazzie, an epidemiologist with the Navajo Epidemiology Center with the indian health

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agency, said the individual is resting and being treated at University of New Mexico, but he probably would not have an update on the condition of the person by April 22, before *Gallup Sun's* press time

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Yazzie said that as of now, the Navajo Nation is not aware of any additional cases of HPS, which is most commonly transmitted to humans by airborne contact with particles from rodent feces — the most common creature being deer mice.

One of the reasons the Navajo Nation is putting word out about the case is that early symptoms of HPS — a disease which can be deadly — are similar to COVID-19. The only way to confirm the difference between the two is a test, which is taken at a medical center before samples are sent to a lab. It can take anywhere from 24-48 hours to achieve results, Yazzie said.

There's no vaccine for HPS, but since it can be fatal for some people, medical officials recommend early treatment at a medical facility. Patients with the most severe cases of HPS could be on blood re-oxygenation machines for up to a month, Yazzie said.

HPS can occur on the reservation any time of year, but the most common occurrences of it come in the spring and summer months. Yazzie says it is possible only one case might pop up a year, but as much as five can be reported during the same time frame.

Spring is a popular time for HPS to occur because that's when many people are doing their spring cleaning, Yazzie said. Rodents can hide in sheds and place droppings there during the winter months, making it likely that humans will find and try to clean them up in the spring. "Junk cars" around homes are also popular spots for rodents, as they can set up nests and lay droppings there, Yazzie said.

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In order to prevent sickness from occurring, people who find rodent feces can create a bleach and water mix to kill HPS, Yazzie said.