

First seasonal hantavirus case confirmed in N.M.

Written by Staff Reports
Friday, 01 March 2024 00:00



Navajo Department of Health issues advisory, preventative tips

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The Navajo Nation Department of Health has reported the first Hantavirus case of 2024 in San Juan County, New Mexico, and issued a public health advisory on Feb. 22.

In coordination with the Navajo Epidemiology Center and Indian Health Service, the advisory cautions the Navajo public regarding Hantavirus which is also referred to as Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome.

Deer mice are the primary carriers of Hantavirus. The virus is found in mice droppings and

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urine. Individuals are typically exposed to Hantavirus around their homes, cabins or sheds, especially when cleaning out or exploring enclosed areas with mouse droppings.

In 2023, nine cases were confirmed on the Navajo Nation in the San Juan and McKinley counties of New Mexico, and Navajo and Apache counties in Arizona.

Hantavirus is not spread from person to person. Hantavirus infections can occur all year. Based on documented cases, there is an increase in HPS infections during the spring season. In periods of high rain and snowfall, evidence shows increases in Hantavirus cases.

Because of the spring season and recent rain and snowfall, this public health advisory urges Navajo citizens to practice preventative measures to avoid contracting Hantavirus.

PREVENTION STEPS

Hantavirus is transmitted to people who come into contact with or breathe infected deer mice droppings and urine. It is essential to take appropriate precautions when entering areas where deer mice have been. Check surroundings for mouse droppings. To avoid outbreaks, consider preventative actions to stop the spread, such as cleaning around the home.

Symptoms of HPS can be much like COVID-19 or the flu. Only a medical exam and laboratory tests can determine the difference. Monitor any flu-like symptoms and respiratory symptoms. There is no vaccine or cure for HPS, but steps can be taken to reduce the risk of contracting hantavirus.

To prevent HPS, public health officials recommend the following:

- Beware of signs of rodent activity such as droppings, nests or other evidence.

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- Open all doors and windows for 30 minutes to air out before entering a shed, barn or garage.
- Do not stir up dust by vacuuming, sweeping or by any other means when cleaning up rodent droppings.
- When rodent droppings or nests are found, spray them with a household disinfectant and allow them to soak for at least 15 minutes. Disinfectant solution can be made by mixing one cup of bleach with one gallon of water.
- After disinfecting, wear rubber gloves and clean up the droppings with disposable materials such as paper towels, rags, or disposable mop heads.
- Seal all materials, droppings, or nests in double plastic bags and dispose of them in the trash.
- Prevent rodents from entering the home by plugging or sealing all holes and gaps to the outside greater than 1/4-inch in diameter.
- Eliminate or reduce rodent shelters around the home by removing outdoor junk and clutter and moving woodpiles, lumber, hay bales, etc.
- Do not make food readily available to rodents. Do not leave pet food in the dishes. Dispose of garbage in trash cans with tight-fitting lids.

For information about Hantavirus prevention, call the Navajo Epidemiology Center at

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928-871-6539 or visit www.nec.navajo-nsn.gov/Projects/Infectious-Disease and www.cdc.gov/hantavirus.