Health Department urges care in summer cleaning

New Mexico has confirmed its first death from Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome for 2019. A 42-year-old McKinley County woman succumbed to the disease on June 25. Hers is the second case of HPS confirmed in the state this year. The first was a 50-year-old McKinley County woman who contracted it in May and survived.

Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome is a severe, respiratory disease in humans that is fatal in about 40 percent of cases. In New Mexico, the deer mouse is the main carrier for Sin Nombre virus, the hantavirus strain, that can be transmitted by infected rodents through urine, droppings or saliva that contain the virus. People can contract the disease when they breathe in virus that is suspended in the air. It is not contagious between people.

Although there were no cases of hantavirus reported in the state in 2018, there were five cases in 2017. These two cases have prompted the New Mexico Department of Health to remind New Mexicans to be especially careful when opening sheds, cabins and other buildings that have been closed during the cold, as mice and other rodents may have moved in, bringing hantavirus with them.

Department of Health Secretary Kathy Kunkel said, “Stirring up dust in areas where rodents hang out – that includes everything from nests to droppings – can cause the virus to get into the

air where the particles can be breathed in. It's best to air out cabins and sheds before entering them and wet down droppings with a disinfectant."

The NMDOH encourages both healthcare providers and the public to become familiar with the signs of hantavirus infection: Early symptoms include fever and muscle aches, possibly with chills, headache, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and abdominal pain and cough, which rapidly progresses to respiratory distress. These signs typically develop within one-to-six weeks after rodent exposure. Although there is no specific treatment for HPS, chances for recovery are better if medical attention is sought early. Patients are encouraged to tell their provider if they have had an exposure to rodents, their nests or droppings within the two months prior to their illness.

Important steps to prevent contracting hantavirus include:

· Air out closed-up buildings, storage rooms, trailers, cabins and overwintered vehicles before entering.

· Trap mice until they are all gone.

· Soak down rodent nests and droppings using a disinfectant before cleaning up.

· Don't sweep rodent droppings into the air where they can be inhaled.

· Put hay, wood, and compost piles as far as possible from your home.

· Get rid of trash and junk piles to reduce attracting rodents.

· Don't leave your pet's food and water where mice can get to them.

For more information, visit the Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome section of our website, https://nmhealth.org/ .

Staff Reports