

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – The Navajo Nation and its public health partners have confirmed that a Navajo Nation resident died recently from complications of Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS), a rare but potentially fatal disease spread by infected rodent droppings.

It is not known at this time where the individual contracted Hantavirus. The deer mouse is the most commonly infected rodent. Human cases have occurred in all months of the year, but the greatest number of cases has been documented in the spring and summer months. There is evidence that periods of high rain and snowfall, such as El Nino weather patterns, are associated with increased cases of Hantavirus infection.

HPS is transmitted to people that come into contact with or breathe infected urine, droppings and/or saliva of wild mice, primarily deer mice. It is extremely important to take appropriate precautions when entering and cleaning sheds, garages, campers, cabins, barns and other buildings. The illness is not spread from person to person.

The incubation period for developing symptoms after exposure can vary between 7 days and 3 weeks. Once a person is infected, the illness begins with fever, headache and muscle aches. This period is known as the prodromal phase and may also include chills, dizziness and abdominal problems such as diarrhea, nausea and vomiting. At this stage,

Hantavirus infection can be much like “the flu” and only a medical exam and laboratory tests can help to tell the difference between the two illnesses. Hantavirus can then rapidly progress to severe respiratory disease and has proven fatal in many cases. Early diagnosis and rapid transfer to a critical care facility has been shown to reduce the fatality rate. There is currently no vaccine or cure for Hantavirus infection, but steps can be taken to reduce the risk of getting the disease.

To prevent HPS, public health officials recommend the following:

Proper clean-up methods for areas that may have rodent activity:

· Wear a respirator mask before conducting clean-up activities.

· Open all door and windows, leave them open for 30 minutes before cleaning.

· Do not stir up dust by vacuuming, sweeping, or any other means.

· When rodent droppings or nests are found in and around the home, spray them with a household disinfectant and allow them to soak for at least 15 minutes. Any rodent droppings and rodent nests should be sprayed with a pesticide to kill fleas before disinfecting or disposing the carcasses.

· 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.

Rodent-proof your home:

· Prevent rodents from entering the home by plugging or sealing all holes and gaps to the outside greater than 1/4-inch in diameter. Use steel wool, thick wire screen, metal flashing or cement to seal holes.

· Eliminate or reduce rodent shelter around the home by removing outdoor junk and clutter, and by moving woodpiles, lumber, hay bales etc., as far away from the house as possible.

· Do not make food easily available to rodents. Do not leave pet food in dishes. Dispose of garbage in trash cans with tight-fitting lids.

For more information regarding HPS, call the Navajo Health Department at 928-871-6350 or Navajo Epidemiology Center 928-871-6265.

You can obtain more information by visiting www.cdc.gov/hantavirus