



Navajo Epidemiology Center

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: Hantavirus and Zika virus

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: HANTAVIRUS

Is hantavirus contagious person-to-person?

No. There are other hantaviruses around the world that can be transmitted from one person to another. However, the particular hantavirus in the American Southwest is not transmitted from one person to another.

Does hantavirus affect everyone who gets exposed to it?

We don't know if everyone who is exposed will get sick, but we do think that most people who are infected with hantavirus do get sick. There might be people who have mild illness, but we can't say who will get very sick and who will not. Therefore, it is important to seek medical care if you have sudden illness and have possible rodent exposure in the 1-2 months prior to illness.

Will my cat die if it eats a mouse infected with hantavirus?

No. However, if your cat brings an infected mouse into your home, you may be at risk if you have contact with that infected rodent. Other animals, like cats, dogs and prairie dogs have been tested to see if they could carry hantavirus, and they don't carry it. Certain rodents, however, including the deer mouse, white-footed mouse, cotton rat, and rice rat, are known to carry hantaviruses able to cause disease in humans. It is important to take care whenever cleaning up after rodents. More information can be found at CDC's website, searching "Cleaning up after rodents." (www.cdc.gov/rodents)

How, when, where do mice get hantavirus?

Hantavirus is already present in the body fluids and tissues of many, but not all, deer mice. They give the virus to one another when fighting for mates, when there can be scratches and bites. The mother deer mouse does not pass the virus on to her babies. Once infected, a deer mouse can spread virus for a long time. Though hantavirus can be found in the body fluids and tissues of many deer mice, not all deer mice are infected.

Can I use moth balls to keep mice away?

Mothballs may seem to work temporarily, but it is not a long-term solution. Initially, the deer mice will avoid the mothballs, and eventually they will find new paths or places to build nests. It is best to Seal Up, then Trap Up, then Clean Up. Learn more at www.cdc.gov/rodents.

Should we use masks when cleaning up deer mouse droppings? Should we clean a room with Clorox?



Masks (or specifically, P99 respirators that are properly fit-tested, on left) can be used when you are cleaning up after rodents, but the most important thing you can do to protect yourself is to properly disinfect any rodent droppings or materials first, and to wear gloves. You can use household disinfectant or freshly prepared water and bleach solution (one part bleach to 10 parts water). After disinfecting things like small piles of droppings, a dead deer mouse in a trap, or deer mouse urine on the floor, put on gloves and gently remove disinfected materials with a paper towel. Afterwards wash the gloves, and then your hands, carefully with soap and water. Normal soap can kill hantavirus. However, if you have several large piles of deer mouse droppings, and see lots of deer mice (dead or alive), this is more serious, and you will need to discuss this with experts at the Navajo Department of Health at (928) 871-6350.

Does Navajo Nation do anything to control the deer mouse population?

The Navajo Nation Department of Health does not trap deer mice, because the deer mice are so widespread.

What should we do with neighbors who are hoarders or who have messy yards and homes?

If you feel comfortable communicating with your neighbor, perhaps you might start a conversation about the dangers of hantavirus infection and the rodents that carry this disease. For your own safety, you can Seal up, Trap up, and Clean up around your home. This will help any existing problems and help prevent future problems. More information on these steps can be found on CDC's website, www.cdc.gov/rodents. Contact the Navajo Nation Office of Environmental Health at (978) 871-7961. They will come to the site, inspect it, and make recommendations for next steps.



What do we do with clothes that have mice droppings on them?

Laundry detergent kills hantavirus, so the clothes can be washed. They do not need to be thrown away. Be sure to wash your hands with soap and water after handling any soiled materials.

What time of day are deer mice most active?

Different species of mice are active at different times of the day. The most common carrier of hantavirus, the deer mouse, is nocturnal or is most active during the night. During the day, they will rest, often in nests.

Is it ok to cook with firewood that have mouse droppings on them?

Yes. The heat will kill the virus. However, it is possible that, if the droppings that are on the firewood have hantavirus on them, then perhaps the virus could pass from the firewood to the hand of the person carrying the firewood, and that the person could become ill. It is very important to disinfect before handling whenever possible and wash your hands with soap and water after handling any contaminated material.

What about touching deer mice blood accidentally?

If a deer mouse has hantavirus in its body, then there will be virus in their blood. If a person touches the blood of an infected deer mouse, the person is at risk for getting hantavirus.

What do we do with dishes and eating utensils that have mice droppings on them?

Wear gloves when you wash the dishes. The dish soap will destroy the virus. Afterwards, remove the gloves, let them dry, and wash your hands with soap and water.

What symptoms are unique for hantavirus?

An important first symptom is sudden illness, or going from feeling normal to suddenly feeling very sick, often with fever and other flu-like symptoms. Some people report difficulty breathing. However, breathing difficulties are part of other illnesses as well. Some people with hantavirus have mentioned feeling like there is a bag of cement or sand sitting on their chest. When any of these symptoms occurs, it is important to seek medical attention immediately, as it is life-threatening.

Once a person has recovered from hantavirus, can they get infected again in the future?

We don't think so. Our immune system protects us by creating antibodies that linger for many years in our bodies after infection. These antibodies protect us from subsequent infection by hantavirus.

If a hogan has dirt floor, should I dampen the floor before sweeping?

It's a good idea, when sweeping up, to limit the amount of dust that rises into the air. This is because we know that any hantavirus in the area can also be swept up by the broom, and then inhaled. So, dampening the floor is helpful.

If you are diabetic, can hantavirus make it worse?

If someone is already sick and then becomes ill with hantavirus, it might make recovery more difficult, but we do not know for sure. So if symptoms of hantavirus illness occurs, it is important to seek medical attention immediately, as it can be life-threatening.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: ZIKA VIRUS

Do mosquitoes that carry Zika virus affect livestock?

No. So far as we know, if a mosquito carrying the Zika virus bites cattle, goats, or sheep, the animals do not become sick.

How is Zika virus treated?

There is no vaccine to prevent or medicine to treat Zika virus. So, you must treat the symptoms: get plenty of rest, drink fluids to prevent dehydration, take medicine such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or paracetamol to reduce fever and pain. However, do not take aspirin and other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) until dengue disease can be ruled out to reduce the risk of bleeding. And, if you are taking medicine for another medical condition, talk to your doctor or other healthcare provider before taking additional medication.

Are there any Zika cases on Navajo Nation?

No. There have been cases of Zika virus in Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah, but, as of this date, all these cases are in people who have returned from traveling to places where Zika virus is present.

Contact us:

Tel. 928/871-6539

Website: www.nec.navajo-nsn.gov

Email: navajoepi@nndoh.org

Navajo Nation Department of Health: www.nndoh.org

See also:

www.cdc.gov/hantavirus and www.cdc.gov/rodents

CDC Hantavirus Hotline (toll-free): (877) 232-3322