

June 9, 2014

Follow AHS\_Media on Twitter 

## Simple precautions can reduce the risk of hantavirus

SOUTH ZONE – Alberta Health Services (AHS) is reminding Albertans to take simple steps to protect themselves from hantavirus.

Hantavirus – a potentially fatal illness that primarily affects the lungs/respiratory system – is caused when humans inhale particles of urine or feces from an infected rodent, which become airborne when disturbed. As such, anyone who disturbs areas of mice or mice droppings can be at risk.

To protect yourself and greatly reduce your risk of illness, follow these precautions whenever cleaning areas of mice or mice droppings:

- Open doors and windows for ventilation, and keep out of the area for at least 30 minutes prior to starting cleanup.
- Wearing rubber gloves, thoroughly soak droppings, nests and dead mice with a bleach/water solution (one part bleach to nine parts water) or a household disinfectant.
- Let the bleach water solution sit for five minutes.
- Never disturb any droppings, nests or dead mice, prior to soaking with this bleach solution.
- Mop up bleach-soaked droppings, nest and/or dead mice, or pick up with paper towels, and place them in a plastic bag.
- Seal the bag and put in a garbage container with a tight fitting lid.
- Wash your gloves before removing, and then wash your hands.
- Never vacuum or sweep droppings, nests or dead mice. This can create dust that can be inhaled. The dust may contain hantavirus.
- If dealing with significant mouse infestations or with mouse infestations in enclosed spaces with poor ventilation, contact Health Link Alberta (1.866.408.5465) to discuss necessary precautions.

Although rare, hantavirus can be fatal. Infected individuals typically show symptoms one to two weeks following exposure; however, symptoms can appear up to five weeks after exposure. Symptoms resemble severe flu, including fever, body aches, chills, abdominal problems and severe breathing problems.

Any Albertan who has recently been in an area contaminated by mice and subsequently develops severe flu-like symptoms or difficulty breathing should see a doctor immediately. To date, one case of Hantavirus has been confirmed in central Alberta.

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than four million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

-30-

**For media inquiries, contact:**

Lisa Squires  
AHS Communications  
403-502-8619 (office) / 403-581-9036 (cell)