



# Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome

## What is it?

Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) is a serious and often fatal respiratory disease caused by exposure to the Hantavirus. Prior to 1993, little was known about this illness. Now it is closely monitored by public health and natural resource personnel in Canada and the United States.

Hantavirus is found in a species of common deer mice that live in wooded areas. In Canada, mice infected with Hantavirus are most commonly found in British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan. In Ontario, this mouse frequents northern forests; there have been deer mice tested in Algonquin Park that has tested positive for the virus. The risk of being developing HPS in Ontario is very low.

## How is it spread?

Infected mice excrete the virus in their urine, saliva and fecal droppings. Normal air movement or actions such as sweeping or agricultural combining can create a method for the virus to enter humans through the nose or mouth. Less commonly, the virus can also be spread by the bite of an infectious mouse.

## What are the symptoms and when do they occur?

Persons exposed may experience no symptoms or mild symptoms, but often HPS is a serious, fatal disease. Symptoms such as fever, headache, muscle aches, nausea, vomiting, chills, diarrhea and dizziness may occur up to 6 weeks after exposure to infected mice or mice urine, saliva or droppings. Early medical attention is important because respiratory distress can develop rapidly in HPS.

## How can I protect myself and prevent the spread?

The risk of becoming ill with HPS in Ontario is very low; however knowing the risks will help you prevent any potential exposures.

Since deer mice only live in uninhabited buildings, use caution when entering buildings such as cottages and barns that have been empty and may have housed rodents. Carefully air out, clean and disinfect these buildings.

Use a mask (preferably an N-100 mask to cover your mouth and nose) and wear rubber gloves. Rather than sweeping up droppings with a broom, use a damp mop with soap and water to minimize dust. Once the droppings have been removed, disinfect the area by wiping it down with a bleach solution (1 tablespoon of bleach per one litre of water). Let the area air-dry.

Make your home and cottage as rodent proof as possible. Seal holes around doors, windows, and roofs with steel wool or cement. Food, water and garbage should be stored in tight-fitting lids to prevent pest attraction.

For more information, please contact a member of Haldimand Norfolk Health Unit's Infectious Disease Team.



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