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Human case of Hantavirus found in Multnomah County

Testing has confirmed Multnomah County's first case of Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome. Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome, or HPS, is a rare and potentially deadly disease spread by mice and rats. The case, a man in his fifties living in a rural part of the county, is now recovering. He is the ninth person in Oregon since 1993 to become sick from a locally acquired hanta virus. Multnomah County Health Department's Vector Control is continuing to monitor and test rodents in the area.

The virus causing HPS was first recognized in 1993 in the southwestern United States, and has since been identified throughout the United States. The first confirmed Oregon case occurred in Wasco County in 1993; the most recent previous case was in Deschutes County in 2006. Rodent-testing done in recent years in Multnomah County and elsewhere in Oregon has found hantavirus infected mice in various areas across the county and the state.

Symptoms of HPS usually develop within one to four weeks after exposure to rodent droppings. The symptoms are initially flu-like: fever, headache, shortness of breath, coughing, and sometimes vomiting or other gastrointestinal symptoms. However, the disease can then progress rapidly to where breathing becomes so difficult that hospitalization is required.

People can be infected when they inhale airborne particles of urine or droppings from infected mice or rats. Handling infected rodents, their nests, or droppings, then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes may also spread the virus. The following activities put people at risk for Hantavirus:

- Working in areas where mice and rats may live, such as farms.
- Entering or cleaning buildings that have been closed for a long period of time, including hunting shacks, garages, storage sheds, or anywhere with mouse droppings.
- Improperly cleaning up mouse and rat urine, droppings, and nests.

In Oregon, deer mice are the primary carrier of the Hantavirus that causes HPS. Deer mice are recognized by their large eyes and ears and a bi-colored tail. However, as it is difficult to identify a mouse it is as it runs across a floor and infected mice look like uninfected mice, it is good to consider all mice potentially infected.

"Any person who is working around rodent droppings should be careful. Even healthy people are at risk for HPS if exposed to the virus. If you have been exposed to deer mice and become sick, seek medical attention immediately, and let your health care provider know what you were doing," states Multnomah County Health Officer Gary Oxman, MD.

For more information on rodent control contact Multnomah County Health Department's Vector and Nuisance Control at, www.mchealth.org/vector/hanta.shtml or 503-988-3464.

For questions about Hantavirus rodent testing in Oregon, please contact Dr. Emilio DeBess, DVM, MPVM, State Public Health Veterinarian, at 971-673-1111.

Physicians who suspect HPS in a patient, should call their local health department's Communicable Disease program (503-988-3406 for Multnomah County).

Additional information is available in English and Spanish from the Centers for Disease Control website, http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hanta/hps_stc/stc_spot.htm.

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