

Hantavirus Cleaning and Prevention

Last Updated: April 24, 2018

Basic Information: We have no evidence Hantavirus exists at RMBL, but have provided the means of taking precautions for everyone who wishes to do so. The nearest known incidence of Hantavirus was in Gunnison many years ago. Hantavirus is an airborne viral disease that is at least 50% fatal if contracted. Its primary host is the deer mouse which is common here in Gothic; but all rodents, including chipmunks and squirrels, can be infectious.

Prevention: If you come across mice droppings that have not been sun exposed, use a bleach solution to mop it up. Do not sweep with a broom. Use a mop, a mop bucket, and ammonia solution (1:10 dilution of bleach or ammonia or 3% Lysol solution). Alternatively, Hantavirus is killed by direct exposure to sunlight (>30 min) or heat (> 60 degrees C). Sweeping raises the aerosol particles into the air, where they can remain suspended for a long time. Use HEPA respirators (available in the cleaning shed) during initial cleaning if dust is likely to be aerosolized. All supplies can be found in the cleaning supply closet next to Johnson lab. If the area you are trying to clean is free of mouse droppings or has been exposed to sunlight for more than 30 minutes, then you can use a broom. Please ask for assistance if needed. When cleaning a mouse nest, be sure to check out and use a HEPA respirator and wear rubber, latex, vinyl, or nitrile gloves. Spray the nest thoroughly with an ammonia solution and place in doubled plastic bags. After sealing, place the bags in a third plastic bag and seal and then place in a dumpster.

Trapping Mice: The best prevention is to not attract mice to your cabin the first place. Please store food in mouse-proof containers and do not store trash in cabins. If you see signs of mice in your cabin, please trap the mice. Bait the traps with a small amount of peanut butter, roughly the size of a pea, being careful not to catch your fingers in the spring-loaded traps. Place traps against the walls in areas where you suspect the mice may be entering your cabin. Continue to trap for at least one week after you catch the last mouse. To dispose of trapped animals, wear protective gloves. Spray the dead rodent with a disinfectant or chlorine solution. After soaking the rodent thoroughly, take it out of the trap by lifting the spring-loaded metal bar and letting the animal fall into a plastic bag and seal the bag. Then place the bagged rodent into a second plastic bag and seal it. There is a signed box in the freezer in the Sample Processing Room in the Gothic Research Center, where you should put your dead mice to be used for research.

Symptoms: Hantavirus symptoms usually appear within two weeks of infection, but can appear as early as three days to as late as six weeks after infection. Infection includes symptoms of flu: chills, muscle aches, fever of more than 100 degrees, a dry cough, headache, nausea, and vomiting. An additional symptom is difficulty breathing, which can result in pulmonary edema and possibly death. If you become ill with these symptoms, please contact the Director of Finance and Operations immediately so you can be taken to the hospital. There is no "cure" for hantavirus. At present, the only treatment is basically supportive, and is best provided in a hospital's intensive care unit.

April 26, 2018