



# News Release

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **CDPH Urges Caution on How to Avoid Hantavirus following Diagnosis in Northern California Man**

SACRAMENTO – The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) reminds individuals to take precautions when entering cabins, trailers and other buildings that may be infested with rodents after the recent diagnosis of hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS) in a Northern California man.

“Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome is a rare, but often fatal disease spread by rodents,” said CDPH Director and State Public Health Officer Dr. Karen Smith. “The chances of getting the virus are greatest when entering or cleaning buildings, or other closed spaces, where wild rodents are present.”

HPS is caused by a virus that individuals contract through contact with the urine, droppings or saliva of wild rodents, primarily deer mice. Breathing small particles of mouse urine or droppings that have been stirred up into the air is the most common means of infection. The illness begins with fever, headache, and muscle aches and progresses rapidly to severe difficulty breathing and, in some cases, death.

Since HPS was first identified in 1993, there have been 73 hantavirus infections in California and 659 cases nationally. About 30 percent of HPS cases identified in California have been fatal.

The most recent case occurred in a patient who was exposed to the virus in Mono County. Most HPS cases have been exposed in the Sierra Nevada or Southern California mountain areas. Prompt diagnosis and medical treatment increase an individual's chances of recovery.

To prevent HPS, CDPH recommends the following precautions:

- Avoid contact with all wild rodents, their droppings, and nesting materials.
- Before entering an enclosed area that may be infested with rodents, allow it to air out for at least 30 minutes.

- Do not dry sweep or vacuum areas that rodents have potentially contaminated.
- Surfaces that rodents may have contaminated with urine or droppings should be made wet with a 10% bleach solution or a commercial disinfectant following label directions before mopping up.
- Promptly dispose of all cleaning materials when done, and thoroughly wash hands and clothes.
- Examine the outside of all buildings and seal any holes or other areas that would let rodents get inside.
- Store all food items securely in rodent-proof containers.

In addition to hantavirus, individuals in recreational areas should take precautions to reduce exposure to plague, which is carried by other wild rodents, such as squirrels and chipmunks, and their fleas. Steps the public can take include:

- Never feed squirrels, chipmunks or other rodents and never touch sick or dead rodents.
- Avoid walking, hiking or camping near rodent burrows.
- Wear long pants tucked into socks or boots to reduce exposure to fleas.
- Spray insect repellent containing DEET on socks and pant cuffs to reduce exposure to fleas.
- Keep wild rodents out of homes, trailers, and outbuildings and away from pets.

For additional information about preventing HPS, please visit [CDPH's webpage](#) and the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Website](#). For information on plague, visit [this CDPH webpage](#).

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