



# HANTAVIRUS: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

## Key Facts

- Hantaviruses are rare but serious viruses. They can cause severe illness and death.<sup>1</sup>
- Hantaviruses can cause life-threatening diseases such as hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS) and hemorrhagic fever with renal syndrome (HFRS).<sup>1</sup>
- Hantaviruses spread mainly through contact with the urine, droppings, or saliva of a rodent that has a hantavirus.<sup>1</sup>

## About Hantaviruses

Hantaviruses are a group of viruses. They are mainly spread by certain kinds of rodents (mice and rats). Hantaviruses can cause serious illness in humans.<sup>1,2</sup> Early symptoms may feel like the flu (influenza). The illness can quickly worsen and lead to other severe medical problems (complications), often affecting the lungs or kidneys.<sup>1</sup>

## How Hantaviruses Spreads

Hantaviruses spread mainly through contact with a rodent that has a hantavirus or that rodent's urine, droppings, or saliva.<sup>1</sup> Your risk is higher when cleaning or entering enclosed spaces where rodents have been.<sup>1,2</sup>

You can become infected by<sup>1,2</sup>:

- breathing in air that contains the virus near rodent urine, droppings, or nesting materials.
- touching a surface or materials that have infected rodent urine, droppings, or saliva on it and then touching your eyes, nose, mouth, or broken skin before washing your hands.
- being bitten by an infected rodent, which is rare.

It is extremely rare for hantaviruses to spread person to person.<sup>1</sup>

## Diseases Caused by Hantaviruses

Hantaviruses are responsible for two main types of diseases in humans:

- **Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS)**  
HPS is a respiratory disease that affects the lungs. It causes severe illness and, at times, can lead to death. The hantavirus that causes HPS is most commonly spread by deer mice. HPS is rare and can occur in the Western Hemisphere, including the United States.<sup>1,3</sup>
- **Hemorrhagic fever with renal syndrome (HFRS)**  
HFRS is a kidney disease. It causes severe illness and, at times, can lead to death. One hantavirus that causes HFRS is found worldwide.<sup>1,4</sup> Cases of HFRS are more common in Asia and Europe.<sup>1</sup>

## Symptoms

Symptoms vary depending on which hantavirus a person has and what medical problems it causes. Both HPS and HFRS can lead to death and may require hospitalization.

### HPS

The first HPS symptoms usually begin 1 to 8 weeks after coming in contact with the virus. They may include<sup>1,3</sup>:

- fever and chills
- fatigue and muscle aches (often in the back, thighs, or hips)



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- headache or dizziness
- sometimes nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or abdominal pain.

After a few days, symptoms may progress to coughing, shortness of breath, and chest tightness. These symptoms are caused by fluid in the lungs.<sup>1,3</sup>

## HFRS

The first HFRS symptoms typically start 1 to 2 weeks after coming in contact with the virus.

They may include<sup>1,4</sup>:

- fever and chills
- intense headaches
- back and abdominal pain
- nausea
- blurred vision.

It may progress to low blood pressure, bleeding, or kidney failure.<sup>1,4</sup>

## Prevention

There is no vaccine for hantaviruses.

You can take steps to reduce your risk of infection<sup>1,4</sup>:

- Seal holes and gaps in places like your home and garage to keep rodents out.
- Store food in rodent-proof containers.
- Air out enclosed spaces before cleaning.
- Wear gloves and masks when cleaning areas where rodents may have been.
- Safely clean areas with rodent droppings by using disinfectants. (Do not sweep or vacuum. This can stir up dry materials and allow the virus to get into the air.)

## People at Higher Risk

Anyone can get a hantavirus. Some groups are at higher risk<sup>2,3</sup>:

- Those who clean or stay in places where rodents live or buildings that are rarely used
- People who have pet rodents
- Workers in construction, agriculture, or pest control

## Treatment

There is no specific treatment (antivirals) for hantaviruses.<sup>1</sup> Early medical care is important and can prevent death.<sup>4</sup> Patients with severe illness may require hospitalization, breathing support, or intensive care support.<sup>1</sup>

Contact a health care provider if you have HPS or HFRS symptoms and may have been in contact with rodent urine, droppings, or saliva.<sup>1</sup>

## Sources

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