

PRESS RELEASE

Health Advisory

February 21st, 2025



Whitman County
Public Health

Alert Categories



Health Alert

Conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.



Health Advisory

Provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.



Health Update

Provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; no immediate action necessary.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

First reported Hantavirus death in Whitman County

Questions regarding this information may be directed to:

Whitman County Public Health | Disease Prevention Program | DiseasePrevention@whitmancounty.gov

Summary

Whitman County Public Health (WCPH) recently confirmed that a county resident died from Hantavirus. WCPH received the positive lab result on February 16, 2025. The individual had a known local exposure to rodents before their illness. This is the first confirmed case of Hantavirus in Whitman County and the first reported case in Washington State this year. Historically, Washington State has between 1 and 5 confirmed Hantavirus cases each year.

What is Hantavirus?

Hantavirus can cause a rare but serious lung disease called Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS).

Hantavirus is found in the urine, droppings, and saliva of infected rodents. In Washington State, deer mice are the carriers of the virus and usually do not show any signs of being ill while infected.

People can get Hantavirus by breathing in dust that has the virus from fresh urine, droppings, or nests of infected rodents. The risk is highest in closed-up places like sheds, cabins, or cars where rodents live and there isn't much fresh air.

People can also get sick by touching surfaces with the virus and then touching their nose or mouth. However, it does not spread from person to person.

Hantavirus Symptoms

The symptoms of Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) usually begin one to eight weeks after exposure to the virus. Early signs include mild flu-like symptoms such as:

- Fever
- Muscle aches
- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Chills
- Nausea, vomiting or diarrhea

Three to five days after early signs of the disease appear, the late symptoms of HPS begin. These include:

- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Tightening of the chest due to fluid filling the lungs

Hospitalization is often necessary, and more than one-third of cases are fatal. Although there is no treatment to cure HPS, supportive care may be helpful.

Prevent Hantavirus

- Seal up holes or other openings larger than ¼ inch (about the size of a pencil) where mice can get in.
- Place snap traps indoors to catch mice.
 - Sticky traps are not recommended because mice caught in them can continue to spread the virus until they die.
- Store all food items in rodent-proof containers to keep mice away.
- Store wood piles at least 100 feet away from your house to help keep rodent nesting areas away from your home.
- Regularly inspect both the exterior and interior of a vehicle, whether it's in use, abandoned, garaged, or stationary.

Exposure to Rodents

There are several actions you can take to reduce the risk of Hantavirus infection when exposed to rodents:

- Open windows and doors of a potentially contaminated area. Allow the area to air for at least 30 minutes before cleaning.
- Do not sweep, vacuum or otherwise stir up dust and dirt that may contain mice waste.
 - Instead, spray rodent carcasses (including trapped mice), nests, droppings, and other contaminated items with a 10% bleach solution or a virus-killing disinfectant.
 - Allow the disinfectant solution to sit for at least 5 minutes before cleaning up.

Resources

Click the link(s) below to learn more about Hantavirus:

- [More About Hantavirus](#)
- [You Can Prevent Hantavirus](#)
- [Safely Cleaning Up After Rodents](#)