UC RIVERSIDE
Occupational Health

Hantavirus Awareness & Prevention Guide

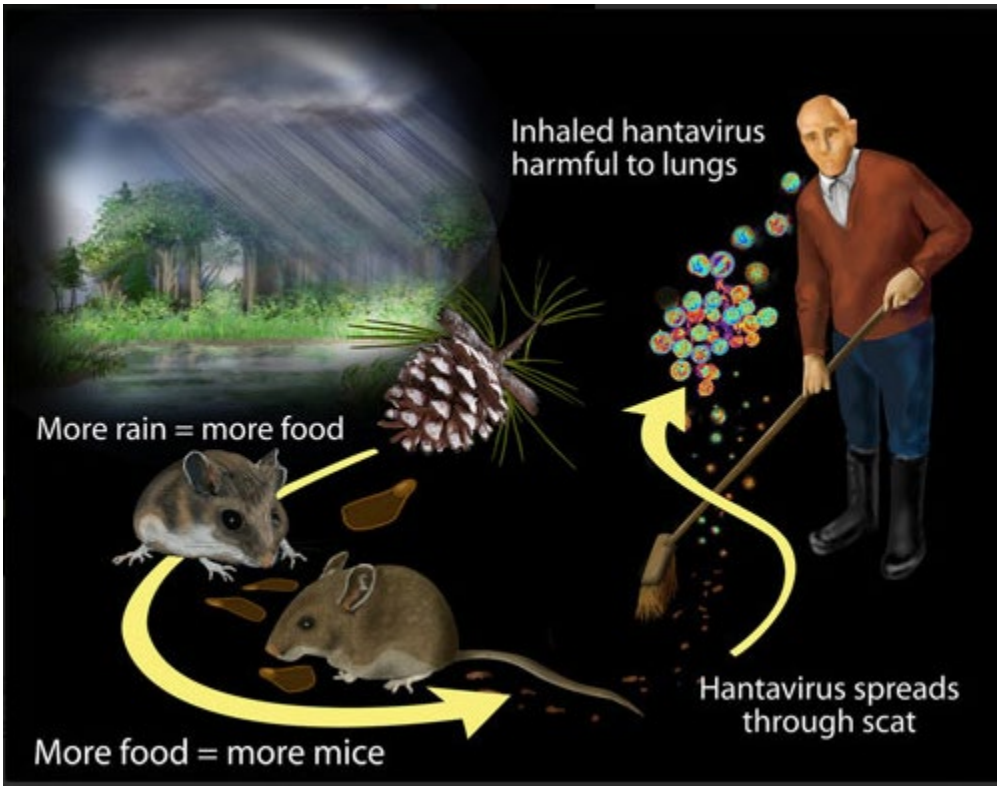
For UC Riverside Personnel Working with Field Rodents

What is Hantavirus?

Hantavirus is a serious and potentially fatal illness transmitted by infected rodents. Humans can become infected through:

- **Inhaling dust contaminated with rodent urine, droppings, or saliva**
- **Direct contact with rodent bodily fluids**
- **(Rarely) through rodent bites**

While dogs and cats are not direct carriers, they may inadvertently expose humans to infected rodents.



Primary Carrier in California: Deer Mouse ***(Peromyscus maniculatus)***

- **Size: Comparable to a house mouse**
- **Color: Pale gray to reddish-brown with a white belly and feet**
- **Tail: Bi-colored and slightly shorter than the body**
- **Habitat: Found in forests, grasslands, chaparral, and brushy areas throughout California**

Who's at Risk at UCR?

- **Field researchers or students handling or trapping wild rodents**
- **Staff cleaning field stations, barns, attics, or storage areas**
- **Maintenance personnel working in crawl spaces or unused buildings**
- **Campers or students working in remote or rural field locations**

Recognizing Hantavirus Symptoms

Symptoms typically appear 1–6 weeks after exposure and may include:

- **High fever (101–104°F)**
- **Muscle aches, chills, and headache**
- **Abdominal, joint, or back pain**
- **Nausea and vomiting**
- **Difficulty breathing due to fluid in the lungs**

Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) can be fatal. If symptoms develop after potential exposure, seek immediate medical care and inform your provider of the rodent exposure.

Prevention Measures

Rodent Elimination

- **Use snap traps baited with peanut butter for at least one week**
- **Treat affected areas for fleas as needed**

- **Use tamper-resistant bait stations in accordance with UC policy**

Disposal Protocol

- **Spray rodents and contaminated materials with disinfectant before handling**
- **Use gloves or an inverted plastic bag to handle carcasses**
- **Seal waste in a plastic bag and dispose of in a rodent-proof container**

Safe Cleaning Practices

Before entering a rodent-infested area:

- **Air out the area for at least 30 minutes**
- **Wear gloves, eye protection, N95 or P100 mask, and protective clothing**

For cleaning:

- **Use a bleach solution (1 part bleach to 9 parts water) or an EPA-registered disinfectant**
- **Spray all contaminated materials before and after handling—do not sweep or vacuum**
- **Mop floors, disinfect hard surfaces, and wash bedding/clothing in hot water**

UCR Fieldwork Safety Guidelines

- **Attend EH&S Field Safety & Hantavirus Awareness Training**
- **Wear HEPA-filtered respirators in enclosed or high-risk rodent areas (contact EH&S medical clearance and for fitting)**
- **Decontaminate reusable PPE and equipment after field use**
- **Do not eat, drink, or touch your face when handling rodents or cleaning traps**

Working with Laboratory and Wild Rodents

- **Lab colonies of deer mice must test negative for hantavirus and be re-tested regularly (check with your facility veterinarian)**
- **Do not mix wild-caught mice with lab-reared colonies**
- **Isolate wild-caught rodents until cleared by testing**

- **Field biologists must treat wild deer mice as potentially infected and wear EH&S-approved HEPA respirators when handling or cleaning**

When cleaning rodent-infested structures:

- **Wear a fitted HEPA respirator and gloves**
- **Ventilate the structure for at least 24 hours**
- **Thoroughly spray all surfaces with disinfectant**
- **Disinfect gloves before removal and wash hands afterward**
- **Avoid sleeping in contaminated areas**

Need Help or More Information?

Contact UCR Environmental Health & Safety (EH&S):

ehs@ucr.edu

(951) 827-5528

ehs.ucr.edu

https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/pages/hantaviruspulmonarysyndrome.aspx#:~:text=How%20can%20I%20help%20p,containers%20to%20keep%20mice%20away.