



1020 Washington St. N, Twin Falls, Idaho
208-737-5900 www.phd5.idaho.gov

May 23, 2011

PRESS RELEASE – For Immediate Release

Contact: Mary Jensen, Epidemiology Manager, 737-5969

As Summer Approaches, SCPHD Reminds Campers and Hikers of the Dangers of Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS)

TWIN FALLS- South Central Public Health District (SCPHD) reminds the public of the dangers of Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS). HPS is a potentially deadly disease transmitted by infected rodents, which in Idaho are likely to be deer mice (distinguished by their white bellies). The virus is contained in their urine, droppings, or saliva.

Humans can contract the disease when they breathe in aerosolized virus from these droppings. Anyone who comes into contact with these mice that carry Hantavirus is at risk of HPS. Rodent infestation in and around homes, cabins, camp trailers, and camp sites remains the primary risk for Hantavirus exposure. Even healthy individuals are at risk for HPS infection if exposed to the virus.

Early symptoms include fatigue, fever, and muscle aches in hips, back, and sometimes shoulders. There may also be headaches, dizziness, chills, and abdominal problems such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal pain. About half of all HPS patients experience these symptoms.

“There are simple ways to take precautions against HPS, including wearing a mask and rubber gloves when cleaning any rodent-infested areas. Visitors to rural areas including campers, hikers, and others who take part in activities outdoors should use other special precautions to avoid HPS,” said Mary Jensen, SCPHD Epidemiology Manager. “Although cases of HPS in campers and hikers are fairly rare, we still stress the importance of taking necessary and easy precautions.”

To minimize the risk for Hantavirus infection, campers and hikers should follow these precautions:

- Before occupying abandoned or unused cabins, open them up to air out. Inspect for rodents and do not use cabins if you find signs of rodent infestation (until it has been properly cleaned).
- If you sleep outdoors, check potential campsites for rodent droppings and burrows.
- Do not disturb rodents, burrows, or dens.
- Avoid sleeping near woodpiles or garbage areas that may be frequented by rodents.
- Avoid sleeping on bare ground; use a mat or elevated cots if they are available.
- Store foods in rodent-proof containers and promptly discard, bury, or burn all garbage.

There is no specific treatment, cure, or vaccine for Hantavirus infection. However, with early diagnosis and prompt medical attention, an infected individual can usually recover. For more information on safely cleaning up after rodents, visit the CDC website <http://www.cdc.gov/rodents/cleaning/index.html> . For more general information, call Mary Jensen, Epidemiology Manager, 737-5969.

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