



For Immediate Release: September 5, 2008
Contacts: Gary Sky (303) 846-6245

Hantavirus Confirmed in Arapahoe County Man

Tri-County Health Department has confirmed that a resident of Arapahoe County has tested positive for Hantavirus. The 47-year-old man was hospitalized, but has been released and is recuperating. He was most likely exposed to Hantavirus while inspecting rodent-infested buildings on an abandoned property in eastern Arapahoe County.

This is the first confirmed case this year in Tri-County's jurisdiction of Adams, Arapahoe and Douglas Counties, and the sixth Hantavirus case in Colorado, which includes one fatality.

Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome is a very rare disease that is carried by rodents, especially deer mice. People catch the disease by inhaling dust containing airborne particles from the feces, urine or saliva of deer mice. It is fatal to humans in almost half the cases.

"This contaminated dust may be found in a closed space such as a garage, cabin, barn, shed or other mouse-infested area," according to Dr. Richard L. Vogt, Executive Director of Tri-County Health Department. "There is no person-to-person transmission and family pets or livestock are not carriers of the virus."

Initial symptoms usually appear about 2-3 weeks after exposure and include fever, chills, headache and severe muscle pain, especially in the lower back and legs. One to five days later, symptoms include a dry cough or difficulty breathing, and can lead to respiratory failure. Medical attention should be sought immediately.

"Deer mice are generally not found near urban populations. They are common in rural areas, but not all deer mice are infected with Hantavirus. Deer mice are named because of their deer-like oversized ears, and identified by their grayish-brown body with a pure white underbody. Household mice are solid colored and are not infectious," Vogt adds. "Hantavirus is extremely rare, but it presents an opportunity to review basic rodent proofing procedures."

There are three recommended steps to rodent prevention—eliminate their food, restrict their shelter, and exterminate them. To reduce any food that may attract mice: clean kitchens daily, including

sweeping crumbs from floors and washing soiled dishes; do not leave pet food in feeding dishes, especially overnight; store grass seed, birdseed, grains and animal feed in rodent-proof containers; keep trash containers tightly closed; and do not place trash outside in plastic or paper bags the night before pickup, since this is an easy source of food.

Eliminate any rodent shelter within 100 feet of a house by trimming shrubbery and brush; keep firewood away from the home and at least twelve inches off the ground; clean sheds and storage areas; and remove abandoned vehicles, tires, piles of trash and other areas that might become nesting sites. Prevent mice from entering homes by filling all cracks over one-quarter inch with steel wool or cement; place three inches of gravel in crawlspaces and under mobile homes to prevent burrowing; and weather-strip doors, windows, garage doors and vents.

Setting traps is a good precautionary measure, even if there is no indication of mouse activity. Mice can be caught in the home and garden with spring-loaded traps baited with peanut butter. Traps can be set on paper plates or inside paper bags for easier removal. Rodent poisons can be used, but are discouraged in homes with children or pets. In addition, poisoned mice can die inside the walls and create an odor problem.

Use caution when cleaning up rodent nests or droppings: open windows and doors for at least an hour to ventilate the area before cleanup whenever possible; wear disposable rubber or plastic gloves; thoroughly saturate the area for at least 15 minutes by spraying a household disinfectant or a 5% bleach solution, which is a cup of bleach in a gallon of water; place rodents, nests or droppings in a sealed plastic bag before disposal in an outdoor trash container; use a disinfectant-dampened sponge, paper towel or mop to clean areas; and most importantly do not vacuum or sweep dry surfaces, as this may cause particles to become airborne in the dust.

When finished, disinfect or dispose of all cleaning supplies. Launder all clothing or bedding that may have been exposed to rodents; wash or disinfect gloves before removing them; thoroughly wash hands with soap and water; and launder all clothing worn while cleaning up the debris. For large infestations, it is recommended that a tight-fitting N-100 NIOSH rating HEPA filter respirator be worn to prevent any inhalation of the airborne particles, since a regular dust mask does not provide adequate protection.

More Hantavirus information is available in English and Spanish on the Tri-County Health Department website at www.tchd.org/animalborne.htm.

###