

# SAFE WORK PRACTICES

## HANTAVIRUS

*\*This information does not take precedence over OH&S. All employees should be familiar with the Saskatchewan Employment Act and the OH&S Regulations.*

**What is Hantavirus?** Hantavirus is a rare virus carried by some rodents in North America. Hantavirus is not a new disease and there is no indication that it is increasing or spreading. All that is new is our ability to recognize.

Hantavirus can be passed on to people through the feces, urine or saliva of infected rodents. Infection is rare but can cause a serious, life threatening illness called Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome.

**What kinds of rodents carry Hantavirus and where are they found?** The deer mouse is the primary carrier of the Hantavirus, but other types of rodents may sometimes carry the virus. Hantavirus infects rodents but does not kill them. Deer mice are found in all the western provinces with cases as far north as Fort McMurray, Alberta.

**What do deer mice look like?** A deer mouse is 7-10 centimeters long from its head to the tip of its tail. It is pale gray to reddish brown and has white fur on its belly, feet and underside of its tail. It has a long tail and large ears for its size.

The droppings of deer mice and other rodents look like small black grains of rice.

**How is the virus spread?** Hantavirus is spread to people from wild rodents. Breathing in the virus is the most common way of becoming infected. The virus can be carried in dust from the rodent feces or mist from urine and saliva. The disease does not cause illness in pets and it cannot be passed from pets to people.

The virus is able to survive in the environment but can be killed by most household disinfectants such as bleach or Lysol.

**What are symptoms of Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome?** The first symptoms of Hantavirus infection resemble those of the "flu". These include fever (101<sup>0</sup> – 104<sup>0</sup> F), head and body aches, chills and nausea. The disease progresses quickly and results in severe difficulty in breathing. ***Medical attention is required immediately.***

Symptoms of Hantavirus infection usually appear within two weeks of infection, but can start as early as three days after exposure.

**Who may be exposed to Hantavirus?** Hantavirus is rare and the risk of exposure is small. However, some activities increase the risk of possible exposure:

- People living in house with rodents or who move into a home where rodents were living.
- Hunters and trappers using cabins with rodents on a seasonal basis.
- Campers and hikers visiting areas with rodents.
- Individuals who work in crawl spaces under homes where rodents are living.

**How to protect yourself:** The best protection against exposure to hantavirus is to prevent all rodents from entering areas where you live or work and to carefully clean and disinfect areas where they have been.