Cotton County Health Department

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Hantavirus Death Confirmed in Texas County

The Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) announced today that a Texas County adult has died due to Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS). This is the first case confirmed in Oklahoma during 2014, and the fifth Oklahoma case since hantavirus was first recognized in the United States in 1993. During 2013, two cases of HPS occurred in Oklahoma; both individuals died as a result of this disease.

Hantavirus is carried by wild rodents, particularly deer mice found in Oklahoma and the southwestern United States. All Oklahoma cases have been from northwestern Oklahoma. Investigations of each HPS case revealed exposure likely occurred when dust was stirred up in rodent-infested areas while cleaning.

The OSDH urges residents to be mindful of the presence or evidence of wild rodents when conducting clean-up activities in a house, barn or other out buildings, especially in rural areas. Infected rodents do not show signs of illness but shed the virus in their urine, feces, and saliva. Persons can be exposed to the virus by breathing in air contaminated with the virus when nesting materials are stirred up and tiny droplets or particles containing the virus become airborne. People can also become infected with hantavirus by touching their mouth or nose after handling contaminated materials, or through a bite from an infected rodent.

Symptoms of HPS usually appear within two weeks of exposure to the virus, but can appear as early as three days to as late as six weeks after exposure. Early symptoms include fever, chills, headache, cough, and body aches. As the disease progresses, the lungs fill with fluid, making breathing very difficult. Anyone with exposure to wild rodents who experiences these symptoms should contact their physician.

The OSDH recommends the following steps to safely clean up areas with possible rodent infestations or waste:

- Ventilate areas inside of closed buildings for at least 30 minutes before you clean by opening doors and windows.
- Use rubber gloves and spray the rodent nest, dead rodents, or droppings until soaked with a household disinfectant solution of 1½ cups of bleach in 1 gallon of water.
- Remove the nest or rodent(s) using a long-handled shovel or rubber gloves.
- Double-bag the nest and dispose in trash. Persons in rural areas may bury the waste 2 to 3 feet deep.
- Spray the area again with the disinfectant solution.
- Wear rubber gloves and wipe up the area with paper towels or rags and double-bag and dispose them in trash container.
- Wash your hands with soap and water immediately after the cleanup.

For more information, visit www.health.ok.gov.

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