

NEWS RELEASE

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For immediate release

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The recent death of a seven-year old South Dakota girl has raised questions about hantavirus pulmonary syndrome—what it is and how to avoid contracting the disease.

Hantavirus is a respiratory virus transmitted by breathing in contaminated airborne particles from the droppings, urine, and saliva of infected mice or rats. It is extremely rare to be infected by a bite from an infected mouse and it is not spread from person to person.

Although it is relatively rare, hantavirus pulmonary syndrome is a deadly disease. Possible symptoms include muscle aches, fever, headaches, cough, nausea, and vomiting. People who develop fever, coughing, and shortness of breath within one to six weeks of potential exposure to Hantavirus should seek immediate medical attention.

Rodent infestation around farms, homes and businesses are the primary areas for exposure. To help prevent the virus from spreading, the Center for Disease Control offers three main strategies -- seal up, trap up and clean up.

Seal up rodent entry holes or gaps with steel wool, lath metal or caulk. Trap rats and mice using an appropriate snap trap. Clean up rodent food sources and nesting sites and take precautions when cleaning rodent-infested areas.

Panhandle Public Health District urges caution when cleaning areas where rodents may live. When cleaning areas where rodents might live, take the following precautions:

- Open all doors and windows for at least 30 minutes before cleaning.
- Wear gloves and a mask to protect from exposure.
- Avoid using vacuums or brooms that can stir up contaminated dust. Instead:
- Wet contaminated areas with a household disinfectant or bleach solution (1 ½ cups of bleach per gallon of water) and let soak for 15 minutes.
- Use a damp towel to clean up the material, then mop or sponge the area with bleach solution or household disinfectant.

For more information, the Panhandle Public Health District at 1-855-227-2217 or visit the Centers for Disease Control website at <http://www.cdc.gov/hantavirus>.

The purpose of the Panhandle Public Health District is to educate the region it serves about the prevention of epidemics, spread of contagious diseases, injury, illness and disability. The district is charged with promoting and encouraging healthy behaviors. They promote the quality and accessibility of health services and protection against environmental hazards. Through education, protection and promotion of these issues, the Panhandle Public Health District believes the quality of life of the residents they serve can be greatly improved.