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Hantavirus Confirmed in Los Alamos County Man
First Hantavirus Case in New Mexico in 2005

A 46-year-old man from Los Alamos County has been diagnosed with New Mexico's first confirmed case of Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome. He has been released from the hospital and is recovering. It is the first time Los Alamos County has had a Hantavirus case.

The case was confirmed by testing done at the University of New Mexico's Health Sciences Center. The New Mexico Department of Health is conducting an environmental investigation of potential exposure sites to determine where the man may have been exposed to the virus.

"We want everyone to be aware that Hantavirus is present in our state and that precautions need to be taken to avoid rodents and their droppings," said Dr. Paul Ettestad, public health veterinarian at the New Mexico Department of Health. "In the past we have seen more cases of Hantavirus during the summer months when rodent activity increases and humans are more likely to come in contact with rodents."

Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome is a deadly disease transmitted by infected rodents through urine, droppings or saliva. People can contract the disease when they breathe in the virus. The deer mouse is the main reservoir for Hantavirus in New Mexico. The Department of Health urges health-care workers and the general public to familiarize themselves with the symptoms of Hantavirus.

Early symptoms of Hantavirus are fever and muscle aches, possibly with chills, headache, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain and cough. These symptoms develop within one to six weeks after rodent exposure. Although there is no specific treatment for Hantavirus, chances for recovery are better if medical attention is sought early.

The best preventive measure people can take is to avoid contact with mice and other rodents. Other important steps are:

- Air out closed up buildings before entering.
- Seal up homes and cabins so mice can't enter.
- Trap mice until they are all gone.
- Clean up nests and droppings using a disinfectant.
- Put hay, wood, and compost piles as far as possible from your home.
- Get rid of trash and junk piles.
- Don't leave your pet's food and water where mice can get to it.

In 2004, New Mexico had four cases of Hantavirus in McKinley, Sandoval, Bernalillo and Santa Fe counties. There was one case of Hantavirus in Rio Arriba County in 2003.

Since Hantavirus was discovered in the Four Corners area in 1993, there have been 65 cases and 27 deaths in New Mexico. Nationally, 387 cases have been reported in 30 states, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. About 36 percent of all reported cases have resulted in deaths.

For more information about Hantavirus, call 800-879-3421 or check out the Department of Health's website, www.health.state.nm.us.

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