

# THE NAVAJO NATION

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## Navajo Department of Health Health Advisory Notice (HAN) Navajo Nation Confirms First Hantavirus Case of 2021 April 19, 2021

**WINDOW ROCK, AZ** – The Navajo Department of Health and the Navajo Epidemiology Center is issuing a notice of the first Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) on the Navajo Nation. The Navajo Nation and its public health partners have confirmed a Navajo Nation resident who contracted the Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) mid-April in McKinley County, a rare but potentially fatal disease spread by infected rodent droppings.

It is not known at this time where the individual contracted Hantavirus. The deer mouse is the most commonly infected rodent. HPS on the Navajo Nation can occur in all months of the year, but the greatest number of cases have been documented in the spring and summer months. There is evidence that periods of high rain and snowfall, such as El Niño weather patterns, are associated with increased cases of HPS.

HPS is transmitted to people that come into contact with or breathe infected deer mice droppings, urine and/or saliva. It is extremely important to take appropriate precautions when entering and cleaning sheds, garages, campers, cabins, barns and other buildings. The illness is not spread from person to person.

The incubation period for developing symptoms after exposure can vary between 7 days and 3 weeks. Once a person is infected, the illness begins with fever, headache and muscle aches. Further signs of developing HPS include chills, dizziness and abdominal problems such as diarrhea, nausea and vomiting.

**Symptoms of HPS can be much like COVID-19 or flu and only a medical exam and laboratory tests can help to tell the difference.** HPS can rapidly progress to severe respiratory disease and has proven fatal in many cases. Early diagnosis and rapid transfer to a critical care facility has been shown to reduce the fatality rate. There is currently no vaccine or cure for HPS, but steps can be taken to reduce the risk of getting the disease.

To prevent HPS, public health officials recommend the following:

**Clean-up for mildly infested areas of rodent activity: AIR OUT**

- Open all door and windows, leave them open for 30 minutes before cleaning.
- Do **NOT** stir up dust by vacuuming, sweeping, or any other means.
- When rodent droppings or nests are found in and around the home, spray them with a household disinfectant and allow them to soak for at least 15 minutes. Any rodent droppings and rodent nests should be sprayed with a pesticide to kill fleas before disinfecting or disposing the carcasses.
  - *Disinfectant solution is made by mixing 1 cup of bleach with one gallon of water.*
- After disinfecting, wear rubber gloves and clean up the droppings with disposable materials such as paper towels, rags or disposable mop heads.
- Seal all materials, droppings or nests in double plastic bags and dispose of them in the trash.

**Rodent-proof your home: SEAL OUT, TRAP OUT, CLEAN UP**

- Prevent rodents from entering the home by plugging or sealing all holes and gaps to the outside greater than 1/4-inch in diameter. Use steel wool, thick wire screen, metal flashing or cement to seal holes.
- Eliminate or reduce rodent shelter around the home by removing outdoor junk and clutter, and by moving woodpiles, lumber, hay bales etc., as far away from the house as possible.
- Do not make food easily available to rodents. Do not leave pet food in dishes. Dispose of garbage in trash cans with tight-fitting lids.

For more information regarding HPS, call the Navajo Epidemiology Center 928-871-6539, visit <https://www.nec.navajo-nsn.gov/Projects/Infectious-Disease> or <https://www.cdc.gov/hantavirus>.