

NEWS

Tuolumne County Health Department

RELEASE

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To: News Media

DATE: September 5, 2012

Time: 1315

From: S. Todd Stolp M.D.

Tuolumne County Health Officer

RE: Tuolumne County Health Department Hantavirus Update

The National Park Service continues to investigate the recent cluster of Hantavirus cases in Yosemite National Park. Thus far, there have been six cases of human hantavirus infection identified, one of which remains under investigation regarding the source of the infection. The following information is intended to clarify some details regarding what is known about the Sin Nombre Virus (SNV) which is responsible for human hantavirus infection and what control measures are appropriate for visitors and residents of Tuolumne County.

Infection with SNV is uncommon. The virus typically causes Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS), a form of pneumonia-like illness. Symptoms usually develop one to seven weeks after exposure to an area infested with deer mice or other rodents, and consist of fever, muscle aches, chills, cough, nausea, and shortness of breath. HPS infection in the U.S. is not transmitted from one person to another. Treatment is aimed at supporting breathing and avoiding superimposed infections from other organisms. Unfortunately, there is no specific treatment for this infection and HPS has been fatal in nearly one third of all cases.

The Sin Nombre Virus responsible for human hantavirus infections is endemic to Tuolumne County and the Sierra Mountain regions of the state. This means that the virus has probably been present for many, many years, sustained primarily by the local deer mouse population. It can be expected to remain in this rodent population, so infrequent local Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome infections can be expected to continue to occur originating in Tuolumne County.

Most human cases in California have originated from the east side of the Sierras. In Tuolumne County, the virus is probably most prevalent and/or most likely to have opportunities for exposure to humans in the Tuolumne Meadows area. However, it should be noted that locally contracted HPS is extremely rare, having been identified in only two cases over the last 13 years during which time over 10 million visitors have passed through the beautiful Tuolumne Meadows area. Nevertheless, it is appropriate for residents and visitors to be aware of measures that should be followed to minimize exposure to airborne particles of the urine, feces or nesting materials of deer mice and other rodents.

Rodent control in and around the home remains the primary strategy for preventing hantavirus infection. Recommendations can be summed up as:

SEAL UP holes inside and outside the home to prevent entry by rodents. This includes clearing brush and grass from around the foundations of homes.

TRAP UP - Trap rodents around the home to help reduce the population. Dead rodents should be handled with gloves.

CLEAN UP urine and droppings, dead rodents or nests around cabins, barns, sheds, or other outbuildings, food sources and heavy rodent infestations. It is important to follow instructions about how to safely clean up contaminated areas. First, do not stir up dust by sweeping or vacuuming up the materials. One should start by ventilating the area for 30 minutes, first opening doors and windows and then returning to clean the area as follows. Spray the contaminated area with a water-and-bleach solution (approximately one and one-half cups household bleach per gallon of water) while wearing waterproof gloves and wipe up the area with paper towels, allowing the feces and contaminated material to soak for five minutes. Dispose of the towels in the garbage. Finally mop the area with a wet mop.

The California Department of Public Health, the National Park Service and other public health experts continue to work diligently on the recent cases from Yosemite National Park and will provide further information to the public as information emerges.
