

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Clover Safe notes are intended primarily for 4-H volunteers and members nine years and older

#75 HANTAVIRUS PULMONARY SYNDROME AWARENESS



Deer Mouse

Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) was first identified in the United States during 1993. According to information available from the National Center for Infectious Diseases, between May 1993 and March 2007 a total of 465 HPS cases were reported nationwide. Of this total 163 (or 35%) of the cases resulted in fatalities. Forty-one HPS cases have been reported in California.

HPS is a disease caused by the *Sin Nombre* virus carried by wild rodents and in California, particularly by the deer mouse.

Infection usually occurs when airborne particles of infectious deer mouse or other rodent droppings, saliva, and/or dried urine are inhaled. Infection may also be caused through a rodent bite. Handling infected deer mice or other rodents and/or their contaminated bedding materials can also cause infection by transfer of the virus from a person's hands to mucous surfaces located at the eyes, nose, or mouth.

HPS symptoms include fever, headache, shortness of breath, muscle aches, vomiting, and abdominal pain. Two to five days after infection, victims develop severe breathing difficulty and may require hospitalization. Persons who have contracted HPS are not contagious to others.

The following precautions should be taken for HPS prevention:

- 4-H youth members should never handle wild rodents (dead or alive).
- 4-H youth members should avoid disturbing or cleaning up deer mice or other wild rodent nests or droppings.
- Keep away from poorly-ventilated buildings or enclosures, especially where deer mice or other rodent contamination is present, unless the space has been thoroughly cleaned and ventilated.
- Practice good housekeeping to reduce the potential for attracting rodents to living or work areas.
- Keep food in rodent-proof containers.
- If you come in contact with wild rodents, nests, or droppings, wash your hands immediately and tell your group leader or camp leader.
- Be aware that personal protective equipment (PPE) must be worn when adult leaders or staff handle dead or live deer mice and other wild rodents. Depending on the potential exposure, PPE may include gloves, coveralls, and an air-purifying respirator.
- If bitten by a deer mouse or other rodent, wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water and cover with a sterile bandage. Then, tell your group leader or camp leader and promptly seek professional medical attention.
- If you suspect you have been exposed to the *Sin Nombre* virus, promptly seek professional medical attention.

Clover Safe Note #77 contains additional information for adult volunteers and staff about how to clean up areas contaminated by rodents.