



# News Release

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## **Hantavirus risks higher this time of year**

*To reduce risk of illness, clean buildings properly and prevent rodent infestation*

**OLYMPIA** — If your spring or summer cleaning uncovers signs that mice or other rodents have been in the area, be sure to take precautions to avoid catching a rodent-carried disease like hantavirus. Diseases spread by rodents are fairly rare in Washington, but they can be serious, even deadly.

Cases of hantavirus illness and other rodent-carried diseases happen year round. However, spring and summer weather brings an added risk as people clean cabins, campers, garages, barns, and other places potentially infested by rodents. Cleaning, sweeping, or vacuuming dried droppings, urine, or nesting materials can stir up contaminated dust that can cause infection when inhaled. If cleaning in a rodent-infested area, always thoroughly wet contaminated areas including trapped mice, droppings, or nests with a bleach solution or disinfectant, and soak for 10 minutes before cleaning. Always wash your hands after touching anything contaminated by rodents.

There are usually less than five cases of hantavirus in the state each year. The disease begins with flu-like symptoms, such as fever, headache, fatigue, and muscle aches. It can worsen and cause difficulty breathing as the lungs fill with fluid. About one in four cases results in death.

Preventing a rodent infestation is one of the best ways to protect against hantavirus. You can discourage rodent activity by removing sources of food, water, and shelter. Store bird, pet, and livestock feed indoors in containers with tight fitting lids. Mice can squeeze through openings as small as a nickel, so sealing all gaps and holes that allow access into buildings is crucial. For people who want to trap or kill rodents, the Department of Health recommends snap traps and other non-poisonous solutions. Follow [other simple steps](#) on the agency's website to prevent exposure to rodent-carried diseases and [to properly clean up](#) rodent-infested areas. Homeowners should consider hiring a professional for major rodent infestations.

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