



# Ecopest Inc.

Complete Pest Control and Tree Spraying Services

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## HANTAVIRUS Alberta Public Health

A case of Hantavirus infection was first noted in October 1994 in the Edmonton area has raised a number of questions about this disease and how to protect yourself from it. Based on calls coming in to the Edmonton Board of Health hotline, these are the most commonly asked questions on Hantavirus.

- **What is Hantavirus?**  
Hantavirus is a disease carried by deer mice that can spread from the mouse, its droppings, and urine. It cannot be transmitted from human to human, only from deer mouse to human. It is fatal in 65 to 77 per cent of cases.
- **How can it be prevented?**  
There are no vaccines against Hantavirus. The only protection is to keep your home or work places as free of deer mice as possible, and to clean up any mouse droppings or urine that you see.
- **How do I know if it's a deer mouse?**  
Deer mice have a white underbelly; regular field mice and voles do not. Deer mice have been trapped in Edmonton homes and outbuildings. However, they are most common in rural areas.
- **Do all deer mice carry the Virus?**  
No. A study in the Edmonton area recently showed only 4 out of 150 trapped deer mice carried the Hantavirus. However, to be on the safe side the Edmonton Board of Health suggest you assume all mice and their droppings/urine are infectious.
- **What do mouse droppings look like?**  
Field mice have droppings that are smooth and pellet shaped, about the size of rice grains. Deer mice have bigger droppings that are brown and rough, and look like ungrounded peppercorns. Again, to be on the safe side, assume all mouse droppings as infectious.
- **Can I be tested to find out if I have Hantavirus?**  
The only way to tell if you are infected is to already have the virus, and then with a special blood test arranged by Provincial Laboratories of Public Health in Edmonton.
- **What are the symptoms of Hantavirus?**  
The symptoms of Hantavirus are flu-like, a fever up to 104 degrees F., chills, body aches and troubled breathing. If you have these symptoms, please see your doctor. If you been around mice or their droppings, please let your doctor know that too. Also, if you have had a high fever for 48 hours after being exposed to deer mice or their droppings, please see your doctor.
- **Can children and infants with Hantavirus?**  
So far,, adolescents and adults are the only age groups to have acquired Hantavirus.
- **How long does it take for the symptoms to show up?**  
Symptoms will most likely appear within two weeks after contact with the mice or their dropping as being potentially infected.
- **How can I clean up safely if I see a dead mouse or droppings?**  
Hantavirus is breathed in. Small particles in the air are taken into the lungs and that's how the infection is most

often acquired. For that reason, the first thing to do to protect yourself is to wet down the droppings or dead mice with a disinfectant or bleach solution, which will prevent the particles from becoming airborne. Use three tablespoons of commercial bleach per one gallon of water mix it fresh daily if you have an ongoing problem with mice. Once it is wet down, wipe up the droppings with paper towels or old rags, being careful not to let your hands touch the droppings (you should wear rubber gloves while doing this). Put the droppings and towels/rags in a plastic bag, and place in the household garbage. You should then clean the area again with the bleach solution just to be safe. Be sure to wash your hands well after the clean up. It is best to call a professional company to carry out a germicidal treatment for Hanta Virus.

- **How do I handle a dead mouse?**

Wear rubber gloves, or put your hand inside a plastic bag. Pick up mouse, then turn the bag inside out so the mouse is inside the bag and you haven't touched it. Wash your hands thoroughly after handling a mouse. If you have taken the mouse out of a trap, wear rubber gloves when re-baiting the trap. You should disinfect the trap by cleaning it with hot water (you can't use bleach solution on the trap because the smell will drive the mice away from the trap). It is best to call a professional company to remove the dead mouse to prevent the spread of disease.

- **How do I clean carpets or upholstery?**

You can either get them commercially steam cleaned, or rent a cleaner and rug shampoo yourself. Get rid of the mouse droppings as above, but do not use the bleach solution. Wet the area first with water, remove the mouse or droppings, then shampoo (do not use bleach on carpets or upholstery). Make sure you use a commercial rug shampoo to which you have added a household disinfectant such as Lysol. It should not stain the carpet or upholstery. For small spot cleaning, spray the area with disinfectant solution and wipe up the droppings as above.

- **What about clothing or bedding?**

Take bedding or clothing outside and either gently roll the droppings off or pick them off with rubber gloves: do not shake them off! This is how Hantavirus is spread. Then wash them as regular laundry and dry them in a dryer or hang them outside in bright sunlight clothes worn while cleaning mouse infection can be handled in the same manner: carefully removing the droppings, then washing and drying.

- **What about cleaning hard surfaces?**

Use the disinfectant (i.e. Lysol) on hardwood floors, and the bleach solution on linoleum floors, counters and appliances. It is best to call a professional company to carry out a germicidal treatment for Hanta Virus.

- **Will winter cold kill the virus?**

In general, viruses can be frozen, and then still be alive when thawed. Whether a mouse or droppings are frozen or not, treat them as being potentially infectious.

- **Do I need to wear a mask?**

If the area is heavily infested with mice or droppings, you may want to wear a mask such as the kind you find in hardware stores. However, the effectiveness of masks is open to debate. You may be better off getting a professional exterminator to clean it up, and if that's not possible, make absolutely sure the area is thoroughly wet down no matter how infested it is.

- **What about workers constantly exposed to mice or their droppings, such as exterminators or farmers?**

People who deal with deer mice on a regular basis should wear a respirator-type mask with HEPA filters.

- **What about cats or dogs who chase or eat mice?**

The virus cannot be spread by any other animal other than a deer mouse. Also the disease only affects humans; cats and dogs will not be infected if they catch a deer mouse. Cats may be a good, cheap form of ongoing pest control.

- **What if a cat or dog gets the droppings on their paws? Can they spread it to people?**

The virus cannot be spread by any other animal other than a deer mouse. Also, the disease only affects humans; cats and dogs will not be infected if they catch a deer mouse. Cats may be a good, cheap form of ongoing pest control.

- **How long does the virus last in the droppings of mice?**  
We're not sure: we advise everyone to treat every deer mouse and all droppings as being potentially infected.
- **What if deer mice have been in wells, or have been nibbling at food?**  
Hantavirus can possibly be transmitted this way. If possible, dispose of any food or liquid that mice have come into contact with, and secure the food or water source so that mice cannot get back into it. If mice are in your well water, contact the Health Inspector to find out how to treat the water.
- **Are mice in gardens or compost heaps a risk?**  
Hantavirus is most often acquired in enclosed spaces where mice and their droppings are present. The concentration of virus outdoors would be very low, minimizing the risk of breathing it in. You can still use the humus from a well-maintained compost because the heat from composting will kill the virus. Any garden fruits or vegetables, which have been nibbled by mice, should be thrown out. Wash all fruits and vegetables as you normally do.
- **Why is this disease hitting now?**  
This is not likely a new disease. It is showing now simply because we have better diagnosis, and so can differentiate it from other viruses.