



Hantavirus: Why you're hearing about it now – and what's important to know

You may have recently seen news coverage about hantavirus related to a cruise ship where passengers have disembarked and are now being monitored as a precaution. The current media coverage reflects heightened visibility, not heightened risk to the public and can understandably raise questions and concerns.

Why Hantavirus is in the News Right Now

The recent cruise ship situation has received widespread attention because it involves multiple countries coordinating a careful public health response. These actions – screening, observation, and controlled disembarkation – reflect precaution, not evidence of a rapidly spreading or new illness.

It is important to remember that hantavirus itself is not new and that media attention does not automatically mean a new or uncontrolled public health threat. Public health agencies have managed localized hantavirus cases and clusters before, including the 2012 Yosemite National Park outbreak, where a small number of visitors became ill after staying in specific tent cabins with deer mouse infestations. Public health actions at that time focused on environmental controls such as closing affected cabins, improving rodent control, and notifying potentially exposed visitors. As a result, there was no widespread community transmission and the situation was contained.

What Hantavirus is

Hantavirus is a rare but serious viral illness carried by certain wild rodents. In the western United States, deer mice are the most common carriers. People can become infected when they breathe in particles from rodent urine, droppings, or saliva, most often when cleaning or disturbing enclosed spaces where rodents have been present.

Hantavirus: Key Facts at a Glance

What it is: A rare viral illness carried by certain wild rodents, especially deer mice.

How people get it: Breathing in dust contaminated with rodent urine, droppings, or saliva.

What it is not:

- Not easily spread between people
- Not similar to COVID-19 in how it transmits
- Not a new disease

Human-to-human spread: Extremely rare. Not documented in the US; seen only in limited situations internationally with a specific strain.

Common early symptoms: Fever, muscle aches, fatigue, headache, and nausea.

Best prevention: Rodent control, safe cleaning practices, and proper ventilation.

Why its in the news: Recent precautionary actions related to a cruise ship—not because of widespread community risk.



The most recognized illness associated with hantavirus in the US is Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS). While HPS can be severe, cases are uncommon with only a small number reported nationwide each year.

How Hantavirus Spreads

The primary route of transmission is environmental, from rodents to humans.

This can occur when:

- Cleaning cabins, sheds, garages, or storage areas with rodent activity
- Disturbing rodent nests or droppings
- Handling rodents without protection

Human-to-human transmission is extremely rare.

In the United States there has been no documented person-to-person spread and globally spread has been limited to only a specific strain (the Andes virus) and only under close, prolonged contact conditions. For this reason, scientists describe the risk as very low, though not zero.

Hantavirus does not spread easily between people and does not behave like COVID-19 or influenza.

Symptoms to be Aware of

Symptoms usually appear 1-8 weeks after exposure and may include:

- Fever and chills
- Muscle aches
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Nausea, vomiting or abdominal pain

In some cases, coughing or shortness of breath can develop later. Anyone experiencing severe symptoms, especially breathing difficulty, should seek medical care and inform their provider about possible rodent exposure.

Practical and Proven Prevention

Preventing hantavirus focuses on reducing contact with rodents, not limiting contact with people. Effective steps include:

- Sealing homes and buildings to prevent rodent entry
- Storing food securely
- Ventilating closed spaces for at least 30 minutes before cleaning
- Using gloves and disinfectant when cleaning rodent droppings (avoid dry sweeping or vacuuming)



- Washing hands thoroughly after cleaning or outdoor work

These measures have been recommended for decades and are highly effective.

We're Here for You

The Ko-Kwel Wellness Center team is here to support the community with information guidance, and care. If you have questions about hantavirus, concerns about possible exposure, or would like help understanding prevention steps, please reach out.

Our goal is to provide clear and factual information in a way that supports health without creating fear. No question is too small, and we are always available to talk through concerns, connect you with resources, or help you determine next steps if needed. Community health is strongest when we stay informed, calm, and connected to one another.

If you need support or have questions, please contact the Ko-Kwel Wellness Center.