



Hantavirus

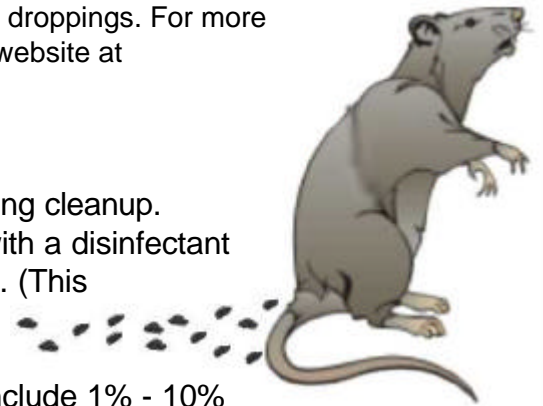
Procedures for Handling Rodents and Rodent Droppings

Background

Hantavirus can infect people with a life-threatening disease known as *Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome* if precautions are not taken to reduce exposure. The virus is found in the excreta (urine, saliva, and feces) of some wild rodents, and can be transmitted to people through the air as a mist. Exposure can also occur when dusts or other contaminated materials are inhaled, ingested, introduced through breaks in the skin, or comes into direct contact with the eyes. People have also become infected after being bitten by infected rodents. Even though the risk of acquiring the disease is low, (as of April 2000 no cases of Hantavirus disease have been diagnosed in Santa Cruz County), members of the UCSC community should exercise caution and adhere to the following procedures when confronted with handling rodents or rodent droppings. For more comprehensive information about Hanta virus visit the CDC website at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hanta/hps/index.htm>.

Precautions

1. Minimize inhalation of dusts and no skin contact during cleanup.
2. Always spray dead rodents and rodent droppings with a disinfectant solution before disturbing, or attempting to clean up. (This holds down dust and kills the virus.) Allow the solution to soak into the waste material for a few minutes before proceeding. Suitable disinfectants include 1% - 10% household bleach, 5% hospital grade bulk Lysol® or any other EPA approved hospital grade disinfectant. (Use commercial disinfectants according to the manufacturer's instructions.) 1% household bleach is an adequate surface disinfectant but 10% bleach is more effective for heavily soiled items such as areas contaminated with rodent feces or nesting materials.
3. Prevent skin contact by wearing gloves. Workers checking and retrieving rodent traps should wear protective clothing, including coveralls and thick rubber gloves.
4. Rodents and rodent droppings may be placed in a plastic bag after being saturated with disinfectant. Securely seal the bag and place in a dumpster for disposal.
5. Gloved hands should be washed with soap and water or a suitable disinfectant prior to removing gloves.
6. Hands should be thoroughly washed with soap and water immediately after removing gloves.
7. Respiratory protection is required if working in buildings or natural enclosures with large concentrations of rodent feces. A half face respirator with high efficiency particulate cartridges (HEPA) is the recommended level of protection. Any employee using respiratory protection must first be trained and fit tested by EH&S.



Symptoms of Exposure

Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome usually appears within 2 weeks of infection but can appear as early as 3 days to as late as 6 weeks after infection. The primary symptom is difficulty in breathing caused by fluid build-up in the lungs. This can quickly progress to an inability to breathe. Early warning symptoms are general flu-like conditions e.g. fever (101-104 °F); headaches; abdominal, joint, and lower back pain; sometimes nausea and vomiting. See a doctor for immediate treatment if you suspect you have been exposed to Hantavirus.