

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Prevent Exposure to Hantavirus**

The Kittitas County Public Health Department (KCPHD) wants to remind residents to protect themselves against hantavirus by keeping rodents out of your home and workplace and taking precautions when cleaning rodent-infested areas. A person may be exposed to hantavirus by breathing contaminated dust from deer mice, cleaning rodent droppings or nests, or by living, working, or playing in rodent-infested settings, according to the Washington State Department of Health (DOH).

The deer mouse is the main carrier of hantavirus in the western United States; however, all wild rodents should be avoided. Deer mice live in all parts of Washington, but mainly in rural areas. Hantavirus is not transmitted by person-to-person contact. A person may be exposed to hantavirus only by coming into contact with infected deer mice, or by breathing dust disturbed by cleaning their droppings or nests (DOH).

Hantavirus causes a serious illness called hantavirus pulmonary syndrome. Symptoms begin one to six weeks after exposure, and include fever, sore muscles, headaches, nausea, vomiting, and fatigue that may progress to shortness of breath and respiratory failure. If you are concerned that you or a family member may have hantavirus pulmonary syndrome, call your healthcare provider immediately.

Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome is rare. Usually one to three cases are reported each year in Washington State. According to Jacqueline Dawson, PHD, Public Health Epidemiologist, “we have 0 to 1 hantavirus cases diagnosed each year in our area, which includes Chelan, Douglas, Grant, Kittitas, and Okanogan counties.” However, three cases have been diagnosed in the past six months in King County residents. This unusual cluster may indicate increased risk in areas where deer mice live, including Kittitas County, compared to past years.

For more information about hantavirus, you can visit DOH <http://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/IllnessandDisease/Hantavirus> or King County’s website at <http://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/health/communicable-diseases/disease-control/hantavirus/cases.aspx> and you can contact KCPHD for more information at 509-962-7515.

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