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The Yakima Health District is proud to present Part 1 of 15 in its biweekly
SPRING AND SUMMER SAFETY SERIES
 Next Topic: Avoiding Tick-Borne Illness

For Immediate Release	Contact: Yakima Health District
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Cautionary “Tails” Tips for Avoiding Hantavirus during Spring Cleaning

Spring is almost here meaning spring cleaning projects will soon be underway. When opening up or cleaning cabins, RV’s, sheds, and barns, area residents may come across rodents’ nests or droppings. Some could potentially be contaminated with the virus that causes Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS). The Yakima Health District would like to remind residents of important steps they should take to prevent this rare but potentially fatal illness.

HPS is caused by a virus found in the urine, droppings, and saliva of some rodents. In Washington, the most common carriers are deer mice. HPS is caused by breathing contaminated particles stirred up from rodent droppings or nests. Illness usually begins within one to five weeks after exposure. Early signs include fever, severe muscle aches, and fatigue. Some people may also experience headaches, dizziness, chills, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and stomach pain. If left untreated, coughing and shortness of breath usually follow as the disease progresses and the lungs fill with fluid. Historically, about one in three people have died after developing HPS.

Because HPS is such a serious illness, it is imperative to take the proper precautions to prevent exposure. The Yakima Health District recommends the following when cleaning rodent infested areas.

- Wear gloves and a mask to protect from exposure.
- DO NOT use vacuums, brooms, dusters or anything else that can stir up contaminated dust.
- Thoroughly wet contaminated areas with a household disinfectant or bleach solution (1 ½ cups of bleach per gallon of water). Let soak for at least 10 minutes. Using a damp towel, clean up the material, then mop or sponge the area with bleach solution or household disinfectant.
- Spray dead rodents with disinfectant until soaked and double-bag along with all cleaning materials. Dispose of appropriately for your area.
- Disinfect gloves before taking them off and thoroughly wash hands afterwards.

While these steps will minimize the risk of exposure, the best way to prevent HPS is to keep rodents out of areas in which people work and live. Check your home for gaps and holes, especially around pipes, vents, and under doors. Gaps bigger than the diameter of a dime are large enough for a mouse to pass through, so ensure all gaps and holes are minimized and/or properly sealed. Remove potential food sources in the home by making sure food is properly sealed, spilled food is cleaned up right away, pet food is put away after use, and garbage is in plastic or metal containers with tight lids. Reduce food sources and nesting areas outside the home by cleaning up trash, controlling weeds, keeping grains and animal feed in plastic or metal containers with a tight lid, and moving wood piles at least 100-feet away from the home.

For more information on Hantavirus and HPS, go to www.doh.gov or www.cdc.gov. To be notified of new installments in the YHD’s *Spring and Summer Safety Series*, sign up to follow the YHD on Twitter by going to www.twitter.com/yakimahealth.