

Hantavirus Disease

Background Information

Hantavirus infections are caused by a group of viruses which are carried by rodents. They can cause very serious diseases: haemorrhagic fever with renal syndrome (HFRS) in the UK, Europe and Asia; and hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS) in North and South America. They can also cause mild, flu-like illness.

Organism

Hantaviruses – there are several Hantaviruses that cause human infection

Incidence and Transmission

There is evidence of mild or subclinical hantavirus infections in some high risk occupational groups.

HFRS is rare in the UK.

The disease can be carried by voles, field mice and rats. It is generally spread via contact with urine, faeces or saliva from infected rodents.

There is no evidence of person to person spread.

Occupations and processes where hantaviruses may present a risk

Occupational exposure to hantaviruses may occur in those who:

- are in contact with infected rodents;
- are in contact with urine, faeces or saliva from infected rodents; or
- are in contact with water contaminated with urine, faeces or saliva from infected rodents.

Occupations where there may be a risk of occupationally acquired hantavirus infection include:

- farm workers;
- sewage and waste water workers;
- watersports instructors;
- pest control workers;
- street cleaners and waste disposal workers;
- forestry workers; and
- nature conservation workers.

Clinical Information

The incubation period is 2–4 weeks (may be 2 days – 8 weeks).

Mild forms of the disease have flu-like symptoms. HFRS is a very serious disease, with a death rate of up to 15%. Symptoms include fever, headache, nausea, vomiting and kidney failure. Anyone with these severe symptoms who may have been exposed to hantavirus should seek immediate medical attention.

There is no effective antiviral treatment and therefore the only treatment is supportive.

Control

The following control measures reduce the risk of infection:

- The rodent population should be controlled effectively.
- Good occupational hygiene practices should be followed, especially washing with warm water and soap.
- Cuts and abrasions should be covered with waterproof plasters.
- Suitable protective clothing should be worn.
- A suitable disinfectant should be used.

Further Information

[Public Health England – Hantavirus](#)