

Rodents in Clients Homes

It is not uncommon for staff to encounter rodents (mice and rats) in the home of clients within the city. These rodent infestations may be minor or significant. Rodents do leave urine trails, saliva trails and feces wherever they go. Contact with these trails may infect persons if there is disease present in the mice. Therefore, if you know of or suspect a mice infestation (you might see mouse or rat droppings, which look like small, black rice grains) and you may be in contact with the rodent or their waste, routine practices must be followed. Call your supervisor to report and then follow their guidance.

Although rodents are disturbing for some people, they do not necessarily present a severe hazard; it depends on how much contact a person will have with the hazardous material – in this case, the possibility of infected mouse droppings. If mice or rats are suspected in the home of a client, tell the client and then report to your supervisor. Severe infestations may be reported to Municipal officials. In severe situations client competency may also be investigated. Regardless of the size of the infestation, immediate action must be taken by the homeowner to eliminate all rodents in the residence. This can be accomplished with a variety of products, including traps and poison. Larger infestations of mice in larger buildings such as apartments will require the intervention of a pest control company.

HANTAVIRUS

Hantavirus infection is caused by a virus that is found in some rodents, especially deer mice in Canada and the United States. Hantavirus infections usually occur in rural or semi rural areas where workers are more likely to contact infected rodents or their droppings. The virus is rarely transmitted to people, but when it is, the virus can cause severe illness — even death. The deer mouse can be pale gray to reddish brown, and has white fur on its belly, feet and underside of the tail. The deer mouse lives primarily in rural and semi-rural areas, but can also reside in urban centres.

People get the Hantavirus infection by coming into contact with the virus left behind in fresh mouse urine or feces (the virus can't survive outside a mouse for more than 48 hours) or by direct handling of an infected mouse. Most often the virus is inhaled when people disturb places where infected mice have left their urine, saliva, or droppings. **NEVER REMOVE DROPPINGS BY SWEEPING OR VACUUMING.** Cleaning results in the greatest exposure to the virus, as wiping, brushing or sweeping are all activities that tend to send particles into the air, especially when performing this task with dry cloths and dry mouse excrement.

How does Hantavirus affect my health?

Those infected with the virus have shown flu-like symptoms that turn to a dangerous, pneumonia-like condition after two or three days. The disease caused by Hantavirus is called Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS). This disease is extremely serious since 50-60% of the people who get the disease die. The disease begins as a flu-like illness. In the early stage, a person infected by the Hantavirus may experience fever, chills, muscle aches, headaches, nausea, vomiting and shortness of breath. However, the disease progresses rapidly and infected people experience an abnormal fall in blood pressure and their lungs will fill with fluid. Severe respiratory failure, resulting in death, can occur within a few days of the early stage symptoms.

How can Hantavirus enter my body?

People can contract the Hantavirus infection through inhalation of droplets of infected mouse saliva or urine, or through the dust of feces from infected wild rodents, especially the deer mouse. Transmission can also occur when contaminated material gets into broken skin, or possibly, ingested in contaminated food or water. Person-to-person transmission in North America has not been reported.

HOARDING

Hoarding is defined as the severe cluttering of a person's home with a large number of items that appear to have little or no value to others so that the home can no longer function as a viable living space.

Homes with clients who have hoarding issues and a rodent problem pose additional risks. While moving the hoarded material, rodent feces may be disturbed leading to an increased risk of contact to the care provider.

The following precautions are recommended when moving hoarded material where rodent feces is present:

- Handle the material as little as possible and wear personal protective equipment such as latex, nitrile or rubber gloves and N95 respirators.

Cleaning Areas Where Rodents Have Fed or Left Droppings:

Remember, if your client has a rodent infestation, first call your supervisor to report it. Do not attempt to cleanup after the mice before contacting the office and asking your supervisor for guidance.

The following precautions are recommended for anyone given the responsibility to clean up areas where rodents have fed or left droppings:

1. Wear latex, nitrile, or rubber gloves and full-length clothing to minimize contact with skin while cleaning up.
2. Wear respiratory protection if there is a risk of inhalation of airborne contaminated material. Staff must be fit-tested and wear N-95 respirators following CSA guidelines
3. Open windows and doors for 30 minutes before and after disinfecting.
4. Mix a solution of 1-cup bleach to 9 cups water or use a household disinfectant that kills viruses.
5. **Do not vacuum, sweep, or dust.** This may spread the virus through the air. Use rags, sponges, and mops that have been soaked in the disinfectant solution.
6. Thoroughly spray or soak any dead rodents, traps, droppings, or nesting areas with disinfectant or bleach solution. Allow 10 minutes for disinfectant to act.
7. Wipe down counter tops, cabinets, and drawers. Wet mop floors and baseboards.
8. Carpets, rugs, and upholstered furniture need to be steam cleaned.
9. Wash clothes and bedding in hot water and detergent. Set the dryer on high.
10. To dispose of contaminated items, including dead rodents and mousetraps, put them in a plastic bag, seal the bag, and put it in another plastic bag. Then seal the outer bag and put the bag into a sealed outdoor garbage can.
11. Wash gloves with disinfectant before taking them off and dispose of the used gloves.
12. When you are done, wash your hands or shower with soap and hot water.

REMEMBER: Never remove rodent droppings by sweeping or vacuuming. Call your supervisor to report if rodents or signs of rodents are present in your client's home.

Supervisors are expected to inform their workers about these hazards and ensure that workers follow safe work procedures.

For more detailed information about how you can protect yourself:

WHRA Occupational and Environmental Safety & Health: <http://www.wrha.mb.ca/professionals/safety/index.php>

WRHA Infection Prevention & Control website: <http://home.wrha.mb.ca/prog/ipc/index.php>