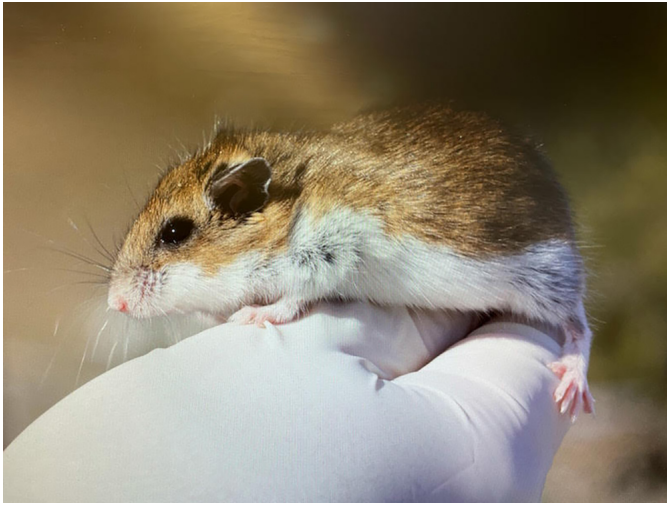


McKinley County hantavirus patient shows improvement

Written by By Kevin Opsahl Sun Correspondent
Friday, 07 May 2021 04:20



Navajo Nation warns hantavirus symptoms similar to COVID-19

A person on the Navajo Nation in McKinley County who contracted Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome was expected to move out of the intensive care unit April 28, an official with the Nation's Department of Health said.

"Patient is doing fine," Del Yazzie, an epidemiologist with the Navajo Epidemiology Center with the Native American health agency, said. "He's alert and talking and [has] been doing some physical therapy."

The most recent development this week follows an announcement about the case in an April 19 news release from the Navajo Nation.

HPS is most commonly transmitted to humans by airborne contact with small particles of rodent feces — the most common being deer mice, Yazzie explained. The Navajo Nation is not aware of any additional cases of HPS at this time, he added.

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Indian Health Services released a statement to the *Gallup Sun* April 28 saying an assessment was conducted by the IHS Gallup Service Unit April 21 at the infected individual's home, where "evidence of rodent activity in the area" was found.

"Education on preventing Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome was provided to the family," IHS said in the statement.

One of the reasons the Navajo Nation is putting word out about the case is that early symptoms of HPS — a disease which can be deadly — are similar to those of COVID-19. The only way to confirm the difference between the two is a test, which is taken at a medical center before samples are sent to a lab. It can take anywhere from 24 - 48 hours to achieve results, Yazzie said.

There's no vaccine for HPS, but since it can be fatal for some people, medical officials recommend early treatment at a medical facility. Patients with the most severe cases of HPS could be on blood re-oxygenation machines for up to a month, Yazzie said.

HPS can occur on the reservation any time of year, but the most common occurrences of it come in the spring and summer months. Yazzie said it is possible only one case might pop up a year, but as many as five can be reported during the same time frame.

Spring is a popular time for HPS to occur, because that's when many people are doing their spring cleaning, Yazzie said. Rodents can hide in sheds and place droppings there during the winter months, making it likely that humans will find and try to clean them up in the spring. Junk cars around homes are also popular spots for rodents, as they can set up nests and lay droppings there, Yazzie said.

In order to prevent sickness from occurring, people who find rodent feces can create a bleach and water mix to kill HPS, Yazzie said.

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