SANTA FE 

– The New Mexico Department of Health reports the death of a 15-year-old McKinley County boy from hantavirus disease. This is the third case of hantavirus in New Mexico this year and the second death.

Hantavirus is a deadly disease transmitted by infected rodents through urine, droppings or saliva. People can contract the disease when they breathe in the virus that is suspended in the air.

“We want to make sure people know how to protect themselves from hantavirus so no other family has to endure this kind of tragedy,” said New Mexico Department of Health Secretary Kathy Kunkel. “People need to avoid contact with mice and other rodents and be careful when cleaning up and avoid disturbing rodent droppings and nests.”

The deer mouse is the main source for Sin Nombre virus, the hantavirus strain most commonly found in New Mexico and it can lead to Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome. HPS causes failure of the lungs and cardiovascular system and leads to death in approximately 40 percent of patients.

People are usually exposed to hantavirus around their homes, cabins or sheds especially when they clean out or explore enclosed areas that have lots of mouse droppings. Mice may try to enter buildings to find shelter, so it is important to seal up homes and other structures used by people.

The Department of Health urges healthcare workers and the public to familiarize themselves with the symptoms of hantavirus. Early symptoms of hantavirus infection may look and feel like the flu or a “stomach bug” and include fever and muscle aches, possibly with chills, headache, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain and cough which progresses to respiratory distress and severe illness.

Symptoms typically develop within one to six weeks after rodent exposure, and although there

is no specific treatment for HPS, chances for recovery are better if medical attention is sought early and the healthcare provider is given a report about environmental contact with rodents or other travel history.

To prevent contracting hantavirus, follow these important steps:

- Air out closed-up buildings such as cabins and sheds, as well as abandoned or stored vehicles before entering
- Trap mice until they are all gone
- Seal up homes and shelters to prevent rodents from entering
- Soak nests and droppings with a disinfectant such as a 10 percent bleach solution before cleaning them up
- Don’t sweep up rodent droppings into the air where they can be inhaled
- Put hay, wood, and compost piles as far as possible from your home
- Get rid of trash and junk piles
- Don’t leave your pet’s food and water where mice can get to it
- Follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s reminder is: *Seal Up – Trap Up – Clean Up!*

All three hantavirus disease cases in 2019 have been in McKinley County. The NMDOH has previously reported the death of a 42-year-old woman and a 51-year-old woman who survived.

There were no cases of HPS in New Mexico last year, but in 2017 there were five reported cases of HPS in New Mexico. Two of whom died.

For more information about Hantavirus, visit the Zoonotic Diseases section of our website: nmhealth.org