

## HEALTH DEPARTMENT CONFIRMS FIRST HANTAVIRUS CASE IN OKLAHOMA

By Michelle Boyd Waters  
Staff Writer

■(GIT) Oklahoma Health Department officials recently confirmed the first case of Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome in a resident of Texas County in the state's Panhandle, said J.R. Nida, M.D., Oklahoma State Department of Health commissioner.

"HPS is a newly discovered viral disease, considered to be an emerging pathogen," Nida said. "The virus is present in the excreta (urine or droppings) of infected mice. Persons may become exposed to the virus by breathing airborne particles of dust containing the virus. Cases are associated with exposure to rodents, rodent excreta and contaminated dust."

The best way to avoid exposure to the virus is to avoid areas that may be infested with rodents.

Dr. Mike Crutchers, state epidemiologist, said Hantavirus does not affect its rodent carriers. It is transmitted to humans through an environment contaminated by rodent urine, droppings or saliva, but cannot be transferred from person to person.

The disease was first reported in the United States in an outbreak in the Four Corners region of New Mexico and Arizona in 1993. Cases have continued to occur sporadically throughout the country since that time, including some in Kansas and Texas. A total of 152 cases have been reported in the United States.

After the discovery of the disease was made, doctors tested blood and tissue samples stored in labs for the disease. Some of the samples tested positive for the virus, so it has been around longer than three years, Crutchers said. He also said that cases of the virus have

been found in South America and Canada.

Crutchers said many varieties of Hantavirus exist around the world, but the strain found in the United States is known as *Sin Nombre*.

"The virus kills half of the people that it infects," Crutchers said.

If one suspects one has been in an area contaminated by the virus, one should see a doctor. Crutchers said a chest x-ray will be able to help a doctor distinguish between Hantavirus and the flu. The first symptoms of the disease appear approximately two weeks after contact with the virus. There is no evidence of person-to-person spread of the disease.

Hantavirus is characterized by high fever, muscle aches and stomach complaints. Crutchers said that these symptoms do sound a lot like the ordinary flu, but the infected person then develops a dry cough followed by an abrupt onset of pneumonia.

People who are infected with the virus must be hospitalized under intensive care, Crutchers said. Hospital personnel treat the person aggressively, which may require careful management of electrolytes and respiratory support.

Medical care is limited to supportive care, Crutchers said. Doctors can only provide care to the patient while the body fights the infection. Patients that die from the virus usually suffered respiratory failure as a result of the infection.

The doctor said no cures or treatments

have been developed to date.

Avoidance of exposure to rodents is the primary method for the prevention of Hantavirus infection. General methods for limiting exposure to rodents include the following:

- ✓ Eliminate rodents and reduce the availability of food sources and nesting sites used by rodents inside the home. Use rodent traps and rodenticides and properly dispose of trash and clutter.

- ✓ Prevent rodents from entering the home. Cover all openings into the home that have a diameter greater than one-fourth inch.

- ✓ Reduce rodent shelter and food sources within 100 feet of the home. In general, keep the area around the home as free of clutter and brush as possible and keep all potential food sources in rodent-proof containers.

- ✓ Wear rubber or plastic gloves while handling rodents or cleaning rodent-contaminated areas. Dispose of rodents by placing them in a plastic bag containing a sufficient amount of general purpose household detergent to thoroughly wet the carcass. Seal the bag and then dispose of it by burying in a two to three foot deep hole or by burning.

- ✓ When camping or hiking, do not use cabins or campsites if you find signs of rodent infestation. Do not disturb rodents or their burrows. Avoid sleeping on bare ground. Do not sleep near woodpiles or garbage areas that may be frequented by rodents. Store food in rodent-proof containers and promptly dispose of garbage.

## GOVERNOR RECEIVES TRAUMA TASK FORCE REPORT

From The Governor's Office

■(OKLAHOMA CITY) Governor Frank Keating Tuesday received a report and final recommendations from the Governor's Task Force on Trauma Systems Development for Oklahoma. The task force was formed after questions arose over the state's lack of a formal, comprehensive trauma care system.

"I appreciate the fine work of this group of medical professionals. I am impressed with their recommendations and I look forward to continued discussion on how to possibly implement them. Where possible, I hope we can accomplish these goals with existing systems and resources. I have asked the task force for a well defined, focused agenda to implement the recommendations. We need to figure out which state agencies would be responsible for the suggestions and what regulatory and statutory changes would be required. Quick access to quality emergency medical care is extremely important and I will continue to work with this task force to examine the issue," Governor Keating said.

Among the recommendations of the task force: establishment of a statewide trauma system that matches minor or major trauma hospital resources with an injured person's treatment needs; implementation of standardized guidelines for patient triage, transport and transfer statewide; implementation of a trauma registry in all hospitals and rehabilitation centers statewide; exploration and implementation of digital and communications technology (telemedicine); promotion of statewide access to 9-1-1 service; and implementation

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markings at Armory Road. The estimated project cost is \$75,780. The City of Sapulpa and Creek County will share equally matching fund costs of \$7,578.

- SUMNER: flashing-light signals with gate arms and a 32 foot timber crossing surface at Red Rock Road near Sumner. The project cost is estimated at \$82,500. The Burlington Northern will pay \$8,250.

Combs said the upgrade projects comply with all state railroad crossing safety regulations. Crossing upgrades financed 90 percent by federal grade crossing improvement funds must be completed within 12 months, he added.