



## COMMUNITY WELLBEING ADVISORY

**To:** Sioux Lookout area Chiefs and Health Directors  
**From:** Dr. Lloyd Douglas, Public Health Physician, Approaches to Community Wellbeing (ACW), SLFNHA  
**Date:** May 22, 2026  
**Re:** **Updates on Hantavirus Current Outbreak**

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### ISSUE

Recent global reports have identified a hantavirus outbreak linked to an international cruise ship. While this is not a widespread outbreak, hantavirus is a serious illness that requires awareness and prevention. The World Health Organization (WHO) has assessed the overall public health risk as low, but notes that additional cases may occur due to the viruses incubation period of up to six weeks.

This Community Wellbeing Advisory provides updated information about the current hantavirus outbreak and outlines practical steps to reduce the risk of infection and protect the health and wellbeing of Sioux Lookout area First Nations communities.

### GLOBAL CONTEXT

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the current hantavirus outbreak was identified in early May 2026 after several people on a cruise ship became seriously ill with breathing problems. The ship, called *MV Hondius*, left Argentina on April 1, 2026, and travelled to several international locations before the illness was recognized. Testing confirmed the virus as the Andes strain of hantavirus. This strain is rare and, in some situations, can spread between people who are in close contact for a long time in enclosed spaces ([World Health Organization, May 13, 2026](#)).

As of May 19, 2026, public health authorities have reported 11 outbreak-related cases, including three deaths. Most cases have been laboratory confirmed, while a small number remain under investigation. All known cases are linked to passengers from the cruise ship. People who may have been exposed are still being monitored in several countries because symptoms can appear up to six weeks after exposure ([European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control \(ECDC\) outbreak update – May 19, 2026](#)).

### SITUATION IN CANADA

In general, hantavirus infections in Canada are very rare but can be serious. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), as of May 1, 2026, there have been 168 confirmed cases in Canada since national surveillance began in 1994 ([Public Health Agency of Canada, May 8, 2026](#)). Across North and South America, about 200 cases of hantavirus pulmonary syndrome are reported each year, with an average fatality rate of about 40%. In Canada, at least 27 deaths were reported between 1989 and 2015 ([PHAC, May 8, 2026](#)). These numbers show that while the disease is uncommon, it can lead to severe illness and death.

Canada is also closely monitoring the current international outbreak of Andes hantavirus linked to the *MV Hondius* cruise ship. On May 17, 2026, PHAC confirmed Canada's first laboratory-confirmed case of Andes hantavirus in British Columbia. The confirmed case involved a passenger from the affected cruise ship who had been isolating and under public health monitoring after returning to Canada. The individual remains in isolation and is receiving medical care. A travelling partner tested negative, and no additional Canadian cases have been

confirmed at this time. Public health authorities continue to monitor high-risk contacts and maintain infection prevention and control measures. PHAC has advised that the overall risk to the general population in Canada remains low ([PHAC, May 17, 2026](#)).

## **RISKS FOR SIOUX LOOKOUT AREA FIRST NATIONS**

At this time, the risk related to the current international outbreak is considered very low for Sioux Lookout area First Nations communities. There is no evidence of community spread in Canada, and the outbreak remains linked to a specific cruise ship exposure being monitored by public health authorities.

For First Nations and northern communities, the main risk comes from contact with infected rodents, especially deer mice, and their droppings, urine, or saliva. People can become infected when cleaning cabins, sheds, or homes where rodents are present. The virus is usually spread by breathing in contaminated dust, not through casual contact between people. Understanding these risks can help communities take simple and practical steps to prevent infection, while continuing important cultural and land-based activities safely.

## **ABOUT HANTAVIRUS**

Hantaviruses are a family of viruses which can cause serious illnesses and, in some cases, death. There are different types of hantaviruses found around the world, and each can cause a different disease. The two most common diseases caused by a hantavirus infection are:

1. Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (found in North and South America)
2. Haemorrhagic fever with renal syndrome (found mainly in Europe and Asia)

People get the virus from infected mice, rats, and other rodents. In North America, 5 rodents are known to carry hantaviruses. These include:

1. Deer mouse
2. Cotton rat
3. Rice rat
4. White-footed mouse
5. Red-backed vole

## **How Does it Spread?**

Hantaviruses spread mainly through breathing in air contaminated with rodent urine, droppings, or saliva. People can become infected with a hantavirus when they:

- Inhale virus particles from rodent urine, droppings, or saliva that have been released into the air
  - This can happen when rodent waste is stirred up from vacuuming or sweeping
- Touch objects or eat food contaminated with the urine, droppings, or saliva of infected rodents
- Are bitten by a rodent infected with a hantavirus (this is rare)

With the exception of the Andes hantavirus, the virus does not spread through person-to-person contact.

## **Signs and Symptoms**

Many people exposed to hantavirus do NOT develop severe illness; however, anyone with symptoms after rodent exposure should seek medical care promptly. Early symptoms (1–6 weeks after exposure):

- Fever, chills

- Fatigue, dizziness
- Muscle aches, headaches
- Nausea, vomiting, stomach pain

Severe symptoms:

- Coughing
- Shortness of breath and difficulty breathing (can be life-threatening)

### **Complications**

Without timely medical care, hantavirus infection (specifically the Andes strain causing hantavirus pulmonary syndrome) can progress very rapidly and become life-threatening. In severe cases, fluid builds up in the lungs, leading to severe breathing difficulties, low blood pressure, heart problems, and shock. In serious cases, this can result in respiratory failure and death. The illness has a high fatality rate (around 30–40% or higher in severe cases) especially without hospital support.

### **Treatment**

There is no specific antiviral medication for hantavirus infection. Treatment focuses on supportive care in a hospital, often in an intensive care unit (ICU). Early medical attention is very important. Doctors can provide oxygen support, help with breathing (including ventilators if needed), manage fluids, and monitor heart and kidney function closely. With prompt hospital care, many people recover, although the illness can be serious.

### **Prevention**

There is currently no approved vaccine for hantavirus infection. Prevention focuses on reducing contact with rodents and safely cleaning areas contaminated by rodent droppings, urine, or saliva. PHAC advises against sweeping or vacuuming rodent droppings, as this can spread contaminated dust into the air. Instead, droppings and contaminated areas should first be sprayed with household disinfectant or a bleach solution and cleaned using wet methods ([PHAC, May 8, 2026](#)).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Protect Homes and Community Spaces**

- Seal holes in homes, cabins, and community buildings
- Store food securely to avoid attracting rodents
- Avoid disturbing rodent nests or droppings
- Use protective equipment when cleaning camps or traplines

### **Safe Cleaning Practices**

Follow the steps below to properly clean and disinfect areas contaminated by rodent droppings:

1. Open doors and windows and leave the area to ventilate before cleaning, when possible.
2. Wear rubber or plastic gloves and masks.
3. Do not sweep or vacuum droppings, nests, or dust.
4. Spray droppings and contaminated areas with household disinfectant or a bleach solution.
5. Let the area soak for at least 10 minutes.
6. Wipe up using paper towels or a wet mop.

7. Place waste in a sealed garbage bag.
8. Wash gloves before removing them, then wash hands thoroughly.

### **What to Do If You May Have Been Exposed**

If you think you may have been exposed to hantavirus, it is important to act quickly.

- Seek medical care early if symptoms develop after rodent exposure
- Inform healthcare providers about possible exposure

For more information, please refer to the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#).

We thank community workers, healthcare providers, and community members for their continued efforts to protect the health and wellbeing of people in the Sioux Lookout area First Nations communities.

If you have any questions, please contact:

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