



Photo courtesy doh.sd.gov

Woman was visiting parents in Ulysses, where she died

By ROBERT PIERCE • Leader & Times The recent death of a Hooker, Okla., woman has been ruled as hantavirus. According to district coroner Dr. Hubert C. Peterson, the woman was 50 years old, and she died last week in Ulysses. Hantaviruses, according to the Centers for Disease Control, are a group of viruses that may be carried by some rodents. Some hantaviruses can cause a rare but deadly disease called hantavirus pulmonary syndrome, or HPS for short.

Last week's case is the first of 2013. No cases were reported to the Seward County Health Department in 2012, and clinic RN Charly Madden said it has been a few years since the last case.

"I would say it has been at least three or four years," she said. "We just want people to be aware of it and not forget."

Peterson said he was called about the case around 9:30 p.m. around March 19.

"She was visiting her parents that live (in Ulysses)," he said. "She had a four-day history of viral symptoms."

Peterson said those symptoms included nausea, muscle aches and increasing respiratory distress. “She went to a Ulysses physician, where she elected to have treatment and return to her parents’ home,” he said. Peterson said tests showed the disease was in its later stages, and the woman was found four hours after returning to her parents’ home. The coroner said the disease attacks lungs and involves all pulmonary tissue similar to what happens with premature babies. “The patients die of total respiratory insufficiency,” he said.

Having been a coroner for many years, Peterson said when he first encountered the case, he had a suspicion that it was hantavirus. Blood was sent into a reference lab to test for sin nombre virus.

Sin nombre virus (No-name virus in Spanish) is a member of the Hantavirus genus in the Bunyaviridae family, along with several other species, including Hantaan, Seoul, Puumala, and Prospect Hill.

It is an enveloped, negative-sense, single-stranded RNA virus. Sin nombre replicates exclusively in the host cell cytoplasm, with entry thought to occur by receptor-mediated endocytosis. It was first isolated in the Four Corners Region of the United States.

Peterson said as of three years ago, about 500 cases of hantavirus had been found in the U.S., and he is surprised that the condition, which is caused by deer mice, does not have more cases.

“It’s been here for thousands of years,” he said. “It’s very rare except in the localized area.”

Peterson added, though, that with last year’s dry conditions, rodent populations decreased, but people will most likely be exposed to the virus in a dry dusty place.

Since the virus exists in dusty conditions, Peterson said people need to spray in those places to minimize dust.

Treatments for hantavirus are systematic, and therefore, Peterson said he does not know what those who believe they have the virus can do other than be put on a respirator.

The condition is not terminal, however, as Peterson said he knows of two people, one from Ulysses and one from Johnson, that have survived hantavirus. The coroner added it cannot be transmitted between people.

Madden said SCDH officials are also advising everyone to use precautions such as masks, hand washing, gloves and not to play with mice. She said while many people associate hantavirus with activities such as spring cleaning, the condition can happen at anytime.

“If they have any questions, feel free to call us,” she said.

The health department can be reached at 626-3369.

Hantavirus kills Hooker, Okla. woman

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