



International Health
Surveillance Division (IHS)

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Department of Health
Bureau of Quarantine
International Health Surveillance Division
Quarantine Services and International Health Surveillance System (QSIHSS)
Health Information Update

Source: WHO, Event Information Site for IHR National Focal
Event Updates: **07 December 2018**

Event Updated	Country	Hazard	Disease	Event Description	IHR Assessment
2018-12-07	Panama	Zoonosis	Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome	<p>The Panama Ministry of Health reported an increase in cases of hantavirus infection in Los Santos Province, Panama, to the Pan American Health Organization / World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO). Between epidemiological week (EW) 1 and EW 47 of 2018, there have been a total of 93 confirmed cases of hantavirus reported in the province. Of these, 47 were classified as hantavirus fever^[1] (HF, without pulmonary syndrome) and 46 classified as hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS) including 4 deaths (overall case-fatality rate 4.3%): Of the 47 HF cases (without pulmonary syndrome), 43% are female and 57% are among persons aged 20-59 years. The majority of these cases (68%) occurred between June and October. Of the 46 HPS cases, 57% are female, 67% are among persons aged 20-59 years, and more than half of the cases occurred in February (17%) and June-September (43%). The 4 deaths were among HPS cases (2 female, 2 male, all aged over 60 years). The cases were confirmed by serology and PCR (3). Sequencing determined that the type of virus associated with this outbreak is Choclo virus. It was first isolated in 1999 in western Panama. Hantavirus cases have been reported in Panama since 1999. In the last five years, transmission has been documented in Los Santos, Herrera, Veraguas, and Cocolé provinces. During 2018, cases have been reported in Los Santos (93 cases), Herrera (2 cases), and Cocolé (1 case) provinces.</p> <p>Three following are the Implemented public health measures: Investigation and monitoring of the cases, including case management. Enhanced surveillance and active case finding. Rodent control and mitigation measures. Awareness and health promotion in the affected areas.</p> <p>HPS is a zoonotic, viral respiratory disease. The causative agent belongs to the genus Hantavirus, family Bunyviridae. The infection is acquired primarily through inhalation of aerosols or contact with infected rodent excreta, droppings, or saliva of infected rodents. Cases of human hantavirus infection usually occur in rural areas (forests, fields, farms, etc.) where rodents hosting the virus might be found and where persons may be exposed to the virus. This disease is characterized by headache, dizziness, chills fever, myalgia, and gastrointestinal problems, such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal pain, followed by sudden onset of respiratory distress and hypotension. Symptoms of HPS typically occur from 2 to 4 weeks after initial exposure to the virus.</p>	Public Health Risk (PHR)

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However, symptoms may appear as early as one week and as late as eight weeks following exposure. The case-fatality rate can reach 35-50%. In the Americas, HPS cases have been reported in several countries. Environmental and ecological factors affecting rodent populations can have a seasonal impact on disease trends. Since the reservoir for hantavirus is sylvatic rodents, mainly *Sigmodontinae* species, transmission can occur when people come in contact with the rodent habitat. The current increase in Hantavirus in Panama could be related to changes in the natural ecosystem that alters the abundance and distribution of rodent species, as well as increased surveillance and laboratory capacity at the provincial level.

In January 2019, World Youth Day will be hosted in Panama. This mass gathering event, which is expected to host approximately 150,000 to 1 million participants, will mainly take place in Panama City but side events will occur in other provinces. A seasonal increase of hantavirus during January has not been documented, and the increase in cases has been related to rural and agricultural activities. Nevertheless, participants to the World Youth Day should have awareness in order to reduce the risk of infection; outdoor activities such as camping or hiking can increase the risk of exposure. Health awareness campaigns for health personnel and the general public are planned for the coming weeks.

PAHO/WHO recommends that Member States continue efforts of detection, investigation, reporting, and case management for the prevention and control of infections caused by hantavirus. Particular vigilance should be carried out amongst travelers returning from the affected areas. Early identification and timely medical care improves clinical outcome. To raise the suspicion of impending HPS, clinicians must use a combination of the following three factors: epidemiological data for guidance of the possible exposure, manifestations of fever and myalgia, and thrombocytopenia. Care during the initial stages of the illness should include antipyretics and analgesics as needed. In some situations, patients should receive broad-spectrum antibiotics while confirming the etiologic agent. Effective clinical treatment depends largely on careful administration of intravenous solutions, hemodynamic monitoring and ventilation support. Given the rapid progression of HPS, clinical management should focus on the patient's hemodynamic monitoring, fluid management and ventilation support. Severe cases should be immediately transferred to intensive care units (ICU). Health awareness campaigns must aim to increase detection and timely treatment of the illness and prevent its occurrence by reducing people's contact with rodents. Preventive measures should cover occupational and eco-tourism related hazards. **Most usual tourism activities pose little or no risk of exposure of travelers to rodents**



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				<p><i>or their excreta. However, people who engage in outdoor activities such as camping or hiking, should take precautions to reduce possible exposure to potentially infectious materials.</i> HPS surveillance should be part of a comprehensive national surveillance system and must include clinical, laboratory and environmental components. The implementation of integrated environmental management, with the goal of reducing rodent populations is recommended.</p>
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* A **public health risk** is something that is (or is likely to be) hazardous to human **health** or could contribute to a disease or an infectious condition in humans.