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PUBLIC ADVISORY ON HANTAVIRUS

PULMONARY SYNDROME - SEPTEMBER 10, 2012

The recent diagnosis of Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) in six Californians, one of whom died, highlights the importance of the public taking precautions to prevent exposure to the virus that causes HPS at their places of residence, work, and recreation. No cases have been reported in Riverside County in the last five years.

Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome is caused by a virus that individuals get through contact with the urine, droppings or saliva of infected wild mice, primarily deer mice. Breathing small particles of mouse urine or droppings that have been stirred up into the air is the most common means of acquiring infection. The illness starts one to six weeks after exposure with fever, headache, and muscle ache, and progresses rapidly to severe difficulty in breathing and, in some cases, death. Individuals who are ill should contact their health care providers.

Since HPS was first identified in 1993, there have been 63 cases in California and 587 cases nationally. About one third of HPS cases identified in California were fatal. Case-patients have been exposed to hantavirus in many areas in California where deer mice live, particularly from the eastern Sierra Nevada region and at higher elevations.

When you are in wilderness areas or places that harbor mice, you can take the following steps to prevent HPS:

- Avoid areas, especially indoors, where wild rodents are likely to have been present.
- Keep food in tightly sealed containers and store away from rodents.
- Keep rodents out of buildings by removing stacked wood, rubbish piles, and discarded junk from around homes and sealing any holes where rodents could enter.
- If you can clean your sleeping or living area, open windows to air out the areas for at least two hours before entering. Take care not to stir up dust. Wear plastic gloves and spray areas contaminated with rodent droppings and urine with a 10% bleach solution or other household disinfectants and wait at least 15 minutes before cleaning the area. Place the waste in double plastic bags, each tightly sealed, and discard in the trash. Wash hands thoroughly afterward.
- Do not touch or handle live rodents and wear gloves when handling dead rodents. Spray dead rodents with a disinfectant and dispose of in the same way as droppings. Wash hands thoroughly after handling dead rodents.
- If there are large numbers of rodents in a home or other buildings, contact a pest control service to remove them.

For additional information on preventing HPS refer to the frequently asked questions (FAQs) posted at http://www.rivco-diseasecontrol.org/Portals/0/documents/Hantivirus_Pulmonary_Symndrome_Sept_2012_FAQs.pdf