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News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Warning Issued for Contact with Rodents

(Las Vegas, Nev. – June 19, 2000) – The Clark County Health District (CCHD) is issuing a warning regarding human contact with rodents. Contact with rodent droppings can lead to hantavirus, and human plague is carried by fleas that feed on infected rodents.

While there has not been a recent case of either hantavirus or plague identified among Clark County residents, past surveillance activities in Southern Nevada have identified the presence of hantavirus in rodents and the plague bacterium in fleas. Additionally, the Southwest Utah Public Health Department has recently been notified of a case of human plague in Washington County.

Human plague is rare and appears in one of three forms. Bubonic plague (the most common), septicemic plague and pneumonic plague. The case reported in Utah was identified as septicemic plague. When plague is identified early it responds well to antibiotic treatment. Symptoms of septicemic plague include high fever, chills, severe malaise, headaches, delirium, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, coma and death if not diagnosed and treated. Symptoms usually start two to six days after exposure.

Preventive guidelines include watching for plague activity in rodent populations where plague is known to occur; reporting observations of sick or dead animals to the local

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health department or law enforcement officials; eliminating sources of food and nesting places for rodents around homes, work places, and recreation areas; removing brush, rock piles, junk, cluttered firewood, and potential-food supplies, such as pet and wild animal food.

If you anticipate being exposed to rodent fleas during outdoor activities apply insect repellents to clothing and skin, according to label instructions, to prevent flea bites. Avoid contact with ill or dying rodents and if you live or hike in areas where rodent plague might occur, treat pets for flea control regularly and do not allow these animals to roam freely.

To avoid potential risk of exposure to hantavirus infection, safely clean up rodent-infested areas by airing out infested spaces before cleanup; spraying areas of infestation including all droppings, nesting, and other materials with household disinfectant or 10% bleach solution. The area may then be cleaned and all waste material sealed in bags, and disposed of. Avoid sweeping, vacuuming, or stirring dust until the area is thoroughly wet with disinfectant. Rubber gloves should be worn and disinfected before removal. Hands should then be thoroughly washed with soap and water.

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