

AN IMPORTANT HEALTH ALERT FOR

# RAT OWNERS & BREEDERS

**Seoul virus** is a type of hantavirus carried by both pet and wild rats, that can cause **serious illness** in people.



## Which rodents can carry Seoul virus?

The brown rat (Norway rat) and the black rat can be infected with Seoul virus, and spread it to people. Other mammals can become infected, but do not spread the virus.

## How do I know if my rat is infected?

Rats do not show symptoms when they are infected with Seoul virus. The only way to know if they are infected is through laboratory testing.

## How long are rats infected with Seoul virus?

Once infected, rats carry and shed the virus for life.

## How do rats spread the virus to people?

The virus is spread by an infected rat through bites, saliva, urine, and droppings. The virus can also infect people when dust with dried urine or droppings, or contaminated bedding, is stirred up and gets in the air.

## What are the symptoms in people?

Most people with Seoul virus infection will have mild or no symptoms. For people who do develop symptoms, they begin suddenly and may include intense headaches, back and abdominal pain, fever, chills, nausea, and blurred vision.

In rare cases, infection can progress to hemorrhagic fever with renal syndrome (HFRS), a bleeding and kidney disease which causes death in 1 to 2% of cases.

If you have any symptoms, seek prompt medical attention, and tell the healthcare provider about your contact with rats.

Seoul virus is not spread from person to person.

## Is this virus the same one that causes Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS)?

No. HPS is a different syndrome caused by different types of hantaviruses carried mainly by mice. HPS is typically more severe than HFRS.

## How should I clean up after my pet rats to avoid being infected?

Take precautions when cleaning up after your pet rats to reduce your risk of infection.

- Spray urine, droppings, and bedding thoroughly with a disinfectant or 10% bleach and water solution and let soak 5 minutes before wiping or mopping up.
- Do **not** vacuum, sweep, or otherwise stir up dust.
- Wear rubber, latex, or vinyl gloves and a dust mask.

- Clean and disinfect cages and supplies outside your home when possible. If you clean them indoors, use a laundry sink or bathtub, and thoroughly clean and disinfect the area immediately afterwards. Never clean cages or supplies in the kitchen sink, other food preparation areas, or the bathroom sink.
- Disinfect any surfaces or items possibly contaminated by rat urine and droppings.
- Wash gloves with disinfectant or soap and warm water before taking them off. Remove gloves, then wash your hands with soap and warm water.

### How else can I protect myself and my family?

- Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water immediately after handling or caring for pet rats.
- Keep rats and their supplies out of the kitchen or other areas where food is prepared or served.
- Do not kiss, nuzzle, or hold rats close to your mouth or face.
- Never eat, drink, or smoke while playing with or caring for your rats.
- If you are bitten or scratched by your rat, promptly clean the wound with soap and warm water, then cover with a waterproof dressing.
- Always supervise children when they handle a rat or any objects that the rat has been in contact with, and make sure they wash their hands properly afterwards.
- Pet rats are not recommended for families with children 5 years old or younger, pregnant women, or people with weakened immune systems because these groups are at greater risk for serious illness.

### What can I do to keep my rats safe?

- Do not purchase rats from ratteries in states affected by the Seoul virus outbreak or that are currently under investigation by CDC. See the CDC webpage for outbreak information: [www.cdc.gov/hantavirus/outbreaks/seoul-virus/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/hantavirus/outbreaks/seoul-virus/index.html).
- Limit the movement of your rats and avoid comingling your rats with rats from other owners.
- Keep records of all movement of your rats, such as sales, purchases, and events attended.
- Rat owners concerned that they may have rats associated with the Seoul virus outbreak can contact their local health department, who will facilitate testing through CDC. Do not give away or release the rats.

### I want to purchase a new rat. How can I make sure that I do not introduce Seoul virus into my home?

Talk with your veterinarian about quarantining and testing newly purchased rats. Avoid purchasing rats from states with ratteries currently under investigation for Seoul virus.

### How can I get my rat tested?

CDC is currently providing testing for rats associated with the Seoul virus outbreak only. Owners of rats not linked to an affected rattery may have their rats tested independently through commercial laboratories, like IDEXX. Contact your veterinarian to arrange for testing.

### What should I do if my rat tests positive?

Contact your local health department to discuss how best to protect you and your family. There is no treatment for rats infected with Seoul virus. The recommendation for infected rats is either life-long quarantine or humane euthanasia.

For more information on Seoul virus:  
[www.cdc.gov/hantavirus](http://www.cdc.gov/hantavirus)