

Hantavirus — Frequently Asked Questions (Updated 04 May 2026)

1. What is hantavirus?

Hantaviruses are a group of viruses carried by rodents (like mice and rats). They can cause serious illnesses in people, including fatalities. People with underlying health conditions may be at a higher risk of poor outcomes.

2. How do people get hantavirus?

People usually become infected when they breathe in air contaminated with virus particles from rodent urine, droppings (faeces), or saliva. It can also happen if these materials get into cuts or eyes, or—rarely—through rodent bites.

3. Can hantaviruses spread from person to person?

Most hantaviruses are not spread between people. They are spread by contact with rodents and their waste.

Exception: A specific hantavirus in South America called Andes virus has been documented to spread between people in close household or intimate contact in rare outbreaks.

The specific hantavirus affecting passengers aboard the MV Hondius has not yet been identified.

4. What are the symptoms of hantavirus infection?

Symptoms can vary but include:

- Fatigue, fever, muscle aches
- Headache, dizziness, chills
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain
- Later: coughing and difficulty breathing

5. How long is it before symptoms appear?

About 1–8 weeks can pass between exposure to the virus and developing symptoms.

6. What is the recovery time?

It may take several weeks to fully recover.

7. Should people worry about casual contact?

No. Everyday social contact (like walking in public spaces, shops, workplaces, or schools) is not a known risk for spreading hantavirus.

Close and prolonged contact with a person suffering from hantavirus is the main risk observed in rare human-to-human spread.

People entering a shared space, such as boarding the MV Hondius for a period of a few hours, are at a lower risk. Those persons visiting the MV Hondius whilst on the island will receive written information once identified.

8. Do I need to isolate at home?

Only those persons identified by Public Health to have had close and prolonged contact with a confirmed or suspected case of hantavirus will be asked to enter isolation (i.e. staying at home). These people will be contacted directly and provided with additional information and support. A member of the Public Health response team will contact every isolating person daily.

9. Do other members of my household need to isolate with me?

Other members of your household do not need to isolate with you. You should however, minimise any face-to-face contact with others, staying in a separate room if possible.

If you believe you may have had contact with a person with hantavirus but have not been approached by Public Health, you should begin isolation at home and email Emergency Planning at anel.obey@helanta.co.sh and await a call back.

10. How long will I need to isolate for?

The length of time required to isolate will depend on the specific hantavirus identified – this information is awaited from our international partners who are treating the active cases. We expect to receive this information by Tuesday 5 May 2026. All persons in isolation will be contacted directly with further updates.

11. What should I do if I am a contact and develop symptoms?

If you develop symptoms, especially fever, contact the hospital on Tele No. 22500 for advice but please **DO NOT** attend in person in the first instance. Early supportive care can improve outcomes.

12. Is there a vaccine or specific cure?

There is no vaccine or specific antiviral treatment for hantavirus infections. Treatment is supportive and based on symptoms, such as hospital care and respiratory support.

Those who become unwell following contact with a person with hantavirus are likely to require medical evacuation to South Africa.