Caution with spring cleaning

A man asks his boss if he can have a day off work to help his wife with spring cleaning. The boss answers, “Sorry, I don’t think that I can.”

“Thank you!” the man replies. “I knew I could count on you.”

With the spring rapidly approaching, the yearly chore of spring cleaning is also upon us. One thing to keep in mind while you are sweeping out the shops, barns and quonsets this spring is the amount of mouse droppings that are around. There are a few things in the droppings from both mice and rats that can cause serious illness or even death.

Rats, mice and other rodents can be carriers of a disease called the hantavirus. This is something that is found in Colorado, as well as in other western states. While the rodents are not affected by the virus, their droppings and urine can contain it. Then, when the virus is able to get into the body, it can cause major illnesses.

The virus can get into the body in a few different ways. With sweeping, the droppings can be made into dust, and then when the dust is breathed in, the virus gets into the body. Also, if the dust lands on the top of a soda can or food, or even if the droppings are at one point on the lid of a can, then when the dirty lid makes it to the mouth, the virus has made its way into the body this way.

Hanta virus infection can be very scary. When a person is infected, the body generally does not show any signs of infection for two-three weeks. After this time the severity of the illness will vary.

The person will usually have a fever, will have breathing problems due to fluid building up in their lungs, and that is often so severe that the person will have to be hospitalized and helped out with oxygen breathing treatments. During this time the person will often have rapidly increasing nausea, vomiting, weakness, occasionally diarrhea and headaches.

The virus then attacks the vessels all over the body, and they become very leaky, losing their fluids out and into the body that is all around them. Often at this time the person will have a dry cough initially, but will then become very, very sick.

The worst thing is that there is not really any cure for the hanta virus. Doctors are limited in what they can do, and mostly they can just help the person to breathe and support the function of their body. The likelihood of actually getting infected with the hanta virus is very low. However, if you do get it, it is a nasty illness that is fatal in a substantial amount of cases.

There are a few recommendations about preventing an infection in the first place. The best idea is to keep mice out, by patching holes or by filling them with steel wool. If a building hasn’t been opened in a while, it might be a good idea to air it out first.

Also, when cleaning out mice nests, they can first be soaked with a 10 percent bleach solution or with detergent to prevent the virus from getting into the air when the nests are moved and cleaned out.

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Justin can be reached by email at Justin.Tyler.Newman@gmail.com with comments or ideas for topics that you may desire to be addressed in this column. The goal of this column is that you find it not only entertaining and informative but also that it creates a desire to take a life-long interest your health and body.