

Illinois Department of Public Health reports six cases of viral illness linked to ratteries

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General public at low risk of infection

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) is reporting six cases of Seoul virus in individuals who had direct exposure to rats in two different Illinois ratteries. Ratteries are facilities where rats are bred. A rattery in Wisconsin purchased rats from the two Illinois ratteries and two Wisconsin residents have also tested positive for Seoul virus. Results of laboratory testing of rats at these facilities are pending.

IDPH is working closely with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and local health departments to investigate the source of these Seoul virus infections, coordinate testing, and prevent possible future cases. IDPH has contacted both Illinois ratteries to identify people who may have been exposed and to follow up on any additional potential illnesses. The ratteries are located in north-west Illinois and east-central Illinois. Neither rattery is currently selling rats.

“Seoul virus is not known to be transmitted from person to person. Therefore, the general public is at extremely low risk,” said IDPH Director Nirav D. Shah, M.D., J.D. “Out of an abundance of caution, we want to let the public know in the event they have recently purchased rats from an affected facility and become ill.”

Seoul virus, a type of hantavirus, is carried only by brown or Norway rats. Other pets and animals cannot be infected. Only a few cases of Seoul virus have been reported in the U.S. Symptoms may include fever, severe headache, back and abdominal pain, chills, blurred vision, redness of the eyes, or rash. In severe cases, infection can also lead to acute renal disease. However, not all people infected with the virus experience symptoms. Five of the six Illinois cases showed no signs of illness.

As the investigation continues, more ratteries or people who have purchased rats at affected ratteries may be identified. Therefore, it is important that people take precautions to avoid becoming infected. If you are concerned about a recent rat purchase, make sure to follow good pet hygiene practices. Contact your local health department or health care provider if you recently purchased or handled rats from an Illinois rattery and are experiencing symptoms of Seoul virus.

As with other diseases carried by rodents, Seoul virus is transmitted to people from direct contact with rat urine or feces, contaminated materials like bedding, and possibly by aerosolized feces, urine, or saliva. It can also be transmitted through a bite from an infected rat.

To avoid becoming ill with diseases carried by rodents:

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after handling your pets or areas where your pets have been.
- Keep your small pets and their cages out of kitchens or other areas where food is served.
- Pet cages, bedding, toys, feed or water containers should be cleaned away from areas where food is served or people may bathe.
- Use gloves and a face mask for cleaning.
- Avoid creating dust from fecal materials by wetting down bedding and disinfecting it.
- Do not sweep or vacuum up rodent urine, droppings, or nests as this creates airborne particles.
- Cover cuts and scratches before handling your pet.
- Don't keep small pets in a child's bedroom, especially children younger than five years.
- Don't snuggle or kiss small pets, touch your mouth after handling small pets, or eat or drink around them

For additional information about safe handling and cleaning practices, go to <https://www.cdc.gov/rodents/cleaning/index.html>.