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NEWSLETTER: NUNAVIK PUBLIC HEALTH

Contacts related to the Hantavirus Outbreak on Board the MV *Hondius*

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Key Points - Hantavirus (Andes strain):

- A rare but potentially serious infection (fatality up to 40%).
- Andes strain identified: endemic to Argentina/Chile, with an unusual increase in reported cases in 2026.
- Transmission is primarily zoonotic (rodents), but human-to-human transmission possible with the Andes strain.
- At this time, the risk to the general population and to identified contacts in Quebec remains low.
- Incubation: 1 to 8 weeks.
- Contagiousness: upon onset of symptoms, can extend to ≥ 1 week.
- Severity varies, with possible progression to severe disease.

Context

On May 2, 2026, the World Health Organization (WHO) was informed of a cluster of severe respiratory illness cases on board the cruise ship MV *Hondius* which had departed from Argentina. The ship was carrying 147 passengers and crew members. On May 12, a total of 11 cases, including 3 deaths, were reported among these travellers. Among those cases, 9 were laboratory-confirmed as hantavirus infections (Andes strain). Some of the cases also boarded corresponding flights during their period of communicability.

The *Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux* (*MSSS*) was informed of 8 contacts residing in Quebec who were exposed during flights taken by a confirmed case linked to the MV *Hondius*. These individuals flew on either an Airlink flight (HLE 4Z132) from Saint-Helen's Island to Johannesburg or a KLM flight (KL592) from Johannesburg to Amsterdam on April 25. Follow-up procedures are under way.

On May 16, a hantavirus case was confirmed in British Columbia. The individual presented with mild symptoms and is currently in isolation. Public health measures were applied, including management of high-risk contacts.

No secondary cases have been reported to date in other provinces.

No passenger from Quebec was on board the MV *Hondius*, and all identified contacts in Quebec are considered to be at low risk.

Epidemiology of the disease

Hantavirus infections are rare worldwide. There are several strains of hantavirus.

The Andes strain is endemic to Argentina and Chile. However, the number of cases identified in 2026 in those countries is unusually high, particularly in the certain central and southern regions. The Andes virus has been recognized as the source of the outbreak in South America.

Transmission

The *Hantavirus* genus includes several virus strains that can occasionally be transmitted to humans, after inhalation of viral particles suspended in the air from rodent secretions such as urine, excrement and saliva.

TRANSLATION

Hantavirus infections are rare but serious zoonoses with an average lethality rate of up to 40%.

Unlike the majority of other hantaviruses, the Ande strain, which is at the root of this outbreak, is one of the rare strains that can spread from human to human.

The risk to the general population is therefore considered very low. The risk to contacts on flights who were not seated within two rows of an index case is considered low.

Symptoms of hantavirus infection

Clinical manifestations vary depending on the the viral strain. Symptoms may appear from 1 to 8 weeks after exposure. The disease can evolve differently depending on the type of hantavirus.

For the Andes strain, the seriousness of symptoms is highly variable. An individual can be contagious upon the onset of symptoms and up to one week afterward, but the contagious period can extend up to recovery or death.

The first symptoms usually appear as a fever, headaches, muscle pain or gastrointestinal symptoms (abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting). For more information on the various phases of the disease, consult the page For health professionals: Hantavirus infection - Canada.ca at Canada.ca.

What is expected of clinicians:

1. Remain vigilant when making appointments as well as during intake and triage to promptly assess the risk of infection. See the outil d'aide à la décision pour les maladies infectieuses lors de l'arrivée des usagers aux services d'urgence.
2. If the patient indicates having been in contact with a known case of hantavirus of the Andes strain or having been on board one of the means of transportation where a known case was present, apply the IPC measures contained in the file Maladie à virus Ebola : mesures de prévention et de contrôle pour les hôpitaux - Mise à jour du 3 décembre 2014 and contact the Department of Public Health (DPH) of the individual's place of residence so the DPH can validate whether the individual is a known contact and then send you the appropriate instructions. **For Nunavik**, contact the physician on duty for infectious diseases **by telephone (toll free) at 1-855-964-2244** or at 1-819-299-2990 (alternative number in case of problems with the toll-free number).
3. Upon the recommendation of the regional DPH concerning laboratory tests:
   - Notify the *LSPQ* of the tests to be sent and perform the following two tests:
     - NAAT hantavirus detection (*MSSS* code 83021).
     - Hantavirus: antibody detection (*MSSS* code 83020).
   - On the requests, indicate any link with the outbreak on board the MV *Hondius*.
   - Send samples as Category A (UN2814).

Useful links

Quebec.ca hantavirus page: Hantavirus infection | Gouvernement du Québec
CDC hantavirus page: https://www.cdc.gov/hantavirus/hcp/clinical-overview/index.html
World Health Organization (WHO). Disease Outbreak News: Hantavirus cluster linked to cruise ship travel, Multi-country. May 13, 2026 https://www.who.int/emergencies/disease-outbreak-news/item/2026-DON601
List of *LSPQ* tests:

- https://www.inspq.qc.ca/lspq/repertoire-des-analyses/hantavirus-detection-anticorps
- https://www.inspq.qc.ca/lspq/repertoire-des-analyses/hantavirus-detection-TAAN

TRADUCTION