

## Brazil to Fund Research on Hantavirus

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Brazil's Ministry of Health and the National Scientific and Technological Development Council (CNPq) will invest more than US\$ 689 thousand (2 million reais) on research into Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS). The funds will be transferred this year to finance 26 projects on this disease, which, in the Federal District alone, has already infected 26 people and killed 11.

The resources are part of a US\$ 19.6 million (57 million reais) package announced September 9 by the Ministries of Health and of Science and Technology. The money will be used for scientific research capable of improving the health conditions of the population.

This year the deaths in the Federal District awakened the interest of health officials and focused public attention on the disease.

HTP is transmitted by dust containing particles of the urine, feces, or saliva of wild rats. In human beings, the hantavirus causes a severe lung infection, which can lead to respiratory insufficiency and death.

According to data from the Ministry of Health, over 400 cases and around 160 deaths related to the disease have been registered in Brazil since 1993.

One of the chief hypotheses to clarify the occurrence of outbreaks has to do with indiscriminate forest destruction in some regions, since HTP is transmitted by wild rats that live in the woods.

Eduardo Hage, General Coordinator of Surveillance and Contagious Diseases in the Ministry of Health, explains that deforestation diminishes the rats' food supply and their natural predators.

Contamination can also occur through the consumption of food and water. For this reason, health officials recommend that all food be stored in sacks or closed containers at least 50 centimeters above the ground. Garbage should also be placed in sealed receptacles to avoid attracting the rats.

The name hantavirus derives from the Hantan River in South Korea. It was in the proximity of that river that Westerners, in the 1950s, were infected by the virus for the first time.

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