



## Emerging and Reemerging Infectious Diseases, Region of the Americas

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### **Unusual Increase in the Number of Persons Infected with Hantavirus in the Department of Boquerón, Paraguayan Chaco Region**

From 1995 to March 2004, a total of 206 patients in Paraguay were identified as being infected with hantavirus (with an IgG and IgM positive serology), of which 93 developed Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) and 113, mild to moderate respiratory symptoms. The general case-fatality rate for HPS is 20% (19/93), one of the lowest in the region. To date, 4 outbreaks have been detected: the first, in 1995 (with 15 cases of HPS); the second, in 2000 (with 15 HPS cases); the third, in 2001 (with 27 HPS cases); and the current one. The remaining 34 cases of HPS were isolated cases occurring during periods between epidemics.

#### ***Current Situation***

From January to 5 May 2004, a total of 11 suspected cases were reported, of which 5 have been serologically confirmed (IgM, IgG), with 1 suspected case pending confirmation. Of the 5 confirmed cases, 2 presented HPS; 1, mild respiratory symptoms with renal syndrome; and the other 2, mild or moderate respiratory symptoms. All have recovered and have been discharged from the hospital. The patients' age ranged from 20 to 49 years. A total of 13 contacts have been investigated in the affected areas, of which 5 (38.4%) turned out to be positive. All the patients with a confirmed serological diagnosis live and work in an endemic area (the Central Chaco) and are engaged in activities entailing risk: agriculture, livestock production and other tasks related to working in the countryside. Four patients have indicated the presence of rodents in their home or workplace. Although the cases have recorded in an endemic area, the recent outbreak has appeared earlier than usual.

National authorities continue with local surveillance activities in the area and are intensifying preventive activities through local mass-media information campaigns.

*Source:* Report to PAHO Communicable Disease Unit from the PAHO Country Office in Asunción, Paraguay.