

Hantavirus

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Hantavirus infections remain rare globally, with no specific USFDA-approved vaccines or antiviral treatments available. They are rodent-borne RNA viruses that infect humans primarily through inhalation of aerosolized particles from rodent urine, droppings, or saliva, and only rarely spread from person to person (notably the Andes strain). Though individual hantavirus infections can be severe and fatal, outbreaks tend to be localized and self-limiting, not reaching pandemic scale. That way it is different from Covid-19 virus that spread very fast and became a pandemic, though mortality rate was extremely low.

Two major clinical syndromes: Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) in America, which leads to severe respiratory failure, and Hemorrhagic Fever with Renal Syndrome (HFRS) in Europe and Asia, which affects the kidneys and blood vessels. Symptoms begin as flu-like illness and can rapidly progress to life-threatening complications, with mortality rates reaching 40–50% in HPS and up to 15% in severe HFRS strains. There are no vaccines or treatment available for Hantavirus diseases.

Historical outbreaks: The first recognized outbreak of HPS occurred in 1993 in the Four Corners region of the US (Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado & Utah) and was caused by the Sin Nombre virus. There were 53 cases during that outbreak, with 32 deaths, reflecting a high fatality rate. During the Korean War (1951–1954), an epidemic of HFRS occurred among United Nations troops near the Hantan River; approximately 3,200 soldiers were infected, and mortality was initially more than 10% before supportive care improved, resulting in an estimated 160–320 deaths during that period. In recent decades, China has reported large numbers of HFRS cases; between 2004 and 2019, there were an estimated 210,000 HFRS cases and around 1,855 deaths. In the United States between 1993 and 2022, a total of 864 hantavirus disease cases were reported, with approximately 302 deaths.

Current situation: A recent 2026 cluster aboard the cruise ship MV Hondius linked to the Andes strain has resulted in a small number of cases and three deaths, drawing attention to the disease but remaining limited in spread.

Little chance of pandemic spread: Hantavirus has a low rate of person-to-person spread compared with respiratory viruses like SARS-CoV-2, the cause of COVID-19. This low transmissibility means that even though individual hantavirus infections can be severe, outbreaks tend to be localized and self-limiting, not reaching pandemic scale. COVID-19, in contrast, spreads efficiently between people through respiratory droplets and aerosols, enabling rapid and widespread transmission globally.

India status: As of now, there are no widely reported or officially confirmed deaths from hantavirus in India linked to the current 2026 global outbreak.

Dr Bino Pathiparampil

Healthcare, Pharmaceuticals, Strategy

+91 22 6164 8572
bino.pathiparampil@elaracapital.com

Associate
Kashish Thakur
kashish.thakur@elaracapital.com

Shivam Agarwal
shivam.agarwal@elaracapital.com



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India
 Elara Securities (India) Private Limited
 One International Center, Tower 3,
 21st Floor, Senapati Bapat Marg,
 Elphinstone Road (West)
 Mumbai – 400 013, India
 Tel : +91 22 6164 8500

Europe
 Elara Capital Plc.
 6th Floor, The Grove,
 248A Marylebone Road,
 London, NW1 6JZ,
 United Kingdom
 Tel : +44 20 7486 9733

USA
 Elara Securities Inc.
 950 Third Avenue, Suite 1900
 New York, NY 10022 United States
 Tel: +1 212 430 5870
 Fax: +1 212 208 2501

Asia / Pacific
 Elara Capital (Singapore) Pte.Ltd.
 One Marina Boulevard,
 Level 20,
 Singapore 018989
 Tel : +65 6978 4047



Managing Director

Harendra Kumar | harendra.kumar@elaracapital.com | +91 22 6164 8571



Head of Sales

Prashin Lalvani - prashin.lalvani@elaracapital.com - +91 22 6164 8544



Head of Research

Dr Bino Pathiparampil | bino.pathiparampil@elaracapital.com | +91 22 6164 8572



Deputy Head of Research & Strategist

Garima Kapoor | garima.kapoor@elaracapital.com | +91 22 6164 8527

Sales Team



India & UK

Prashin Lalvani - prashin.lalvani@elaracapital.com - +91 22 6164 8544



India

Hitesh Danak - hitesh.danak@elaracapital.com - +91 22 6164 8543
Ashok Agarwal - ashok.agarwal@elaracapital.com - +91 22 6164 8558
Himani Sanghavi - himani.sanghavi@elaracapital.com - +91 22 6164 8586
Pooja Soni - pooja.soni@elaracapital.com - +91 22 6164 8558



India, APAC & Australia

Sudhanshu Rajpal - sudhanshu.rajpal@elaracapital.com - +91 22 6164 8508
Joshua Saldanha - joshua.saldanha@elaracapital.com - +91 22 6164 8541
Shraddha Shrikhande - shraddha.shrikhande@elaracapital.com - +91 22 6164 8567
Suyash Maheshwari - suyash.maheshwari@elaracapital.com - +91 22 4204 8698



India & US

Karan Rathod - karan.rathod@elaracapital.com - +91 22 6164 8570



Corporate Access, Conference & Events

Anita Nazareth - anita.nazareth@elaracapital.com - +91 22 6164 8520
Tina D'souza - tina.dsouza@elaracapital.com - +91 22 6164 8595

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 Investor Grievance Email ID: investor.grievances@elaracapital.com - Tel. +91 22 6164 8509
 Compliance Officer: Mr. Anand Rao - Email ID: anand.rao@elaracapital.com - Tel. +91 22 6164 8509