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# The Flu, Covid, Hantas, Ebola, Legionnaires

## The Threat Is Real And All Around Us

Durham — This is allergy season for many people, with symptoms often being confused for something much more serious. Just about everyone has an opinion when it comes to the flu and COVID-19. Recently, the media reported on the hantavirus that affected a cruise ship. Hantaviruses are a family of viruses that can cause serious illness and even death. These viruses can lead to diseases such as Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) and Hemorrhagic Fever with Renal Syndrome (HFRS). They are spread mainly by rodents. The Andes virus is the only type of hantavirus known to spread from person to person. This transmission is usually limited to people who have close contact with an infected person. Orthohantavirus

is a genus of viruses that includes all hantaviruses known to cause disease in humans. Hantaviruses are naturally found primarily in rodents. In general, each hantavirus is carried by one rodent species, and each rodent species carries one type of hantavirus. This week in London, Ontario, Legionnaires' disease struck hard, raising concerns. The disease is a severe form of pneumonia caused by a bacterium known as Legionella. Most people who contract Legionnaires' disease inhale the bacteria through water or soil. Older adults, people with weakened immune systems, and smokers are at a higher risk of becoming ill. The Legionella bacterium also causes Pontiac fever, a milder illness similar to the

flu. Pontiac fever usually clears up on its own. However, untreated Legionnaires' disease can be fatal. Prompt treatment with antibiotics often cures Legionnaires' disease, although some people may continue to experience health problems after treatment. The bacterium Legionella pneumophila causes most cases of Legionnaires' disease. Outdoors, Legionella bacteria live in soil and water, where they rarely cause infections. However, the bacteria can grow in man-made water systems such as air conditioning systems. Although people can contract Legionnaires' disease at home, most outbreaks occur in large buildings because bacteria can grow and spread more easily in larger systems. Home and car air conditioners do not

use water for cooling. How the Infection Spreads. Most people become infected by breathing in tiny water droplets containing Legionella bacteria. This may come from the spray of a shower, sink, or hot tub, or from water used in cooling systems for large buildings. Outbreaks have been linked to:

- Cooling towers used in air conditioning and other building systems
- Hot water tanks and heaters
- Fountains
- Swimming pools
- Birthing pools
- Drinking water systems

The infection can also spread in other ways besides inhaling water droplets, including:

- Aspiration — when liquids accidentally enter the lungs, often from coughing or choking while drinking.
- Aspirating water containing Legionella bacteria can cause Legionnaires' disease.
- Soil exposure — a few people have contracted Legionnaires' disease after gardening or using potting soil containing the bacteria.

On a more serious note. This same week from Africa a health alarm has been rang due to Ebola outbreaks threatening the world. Dr Reimer Chief Medical Officer stated there are currently no Ebola cases in Canada, and there have been no new hantavirus cases since the one announced last week. The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) has previously stated that it is not implementing a travel ban or actively testing travellers for Ebola.

However, Ontario's Health Ministry said a resident who recently travelled to East Africa was tested for Ebola "out of an abundance of caution."

"World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo is spreading, prompting the organization to raise its risk assessment to "very high" for the country, while still maintaining a low global risk level.

PHAC confirmed a positive case of hantavirus last week involving a Canadian isolating in British Columbia after leaving the cruise ship affected by a deadly outbreak. Canada has introduced enhanced Ebola screening measures at airports for returning travellers. Canada's top doctor confirmed Friday that an individual tested in Ontario was negative for the deadly virus.

Dr. Joss Reimer said during a virtual press conference that the risk of the outbreak spreading to Canadians remains low. She would not comment on whether she would recommend travel bans for affected countries. She added that the proactive testing of the Ontario resident, who reported symptoms "consistent with a range of illnesses" after returning from Ethiopia, was "a good example of how quickly measures are activated" when a potential case emerges.

"Both the initial testing conducted in Ontario and the confirmatory testing at the National Microbiology

Laboratory were negative," Reimer said. She also confirmed that the "passenger of concern" aboard a flight redirected to Montreal on Wednesday was assessed by Public Health Agency of Canada quarantine officers and declared asymptomatic for Ebola. The individual has since returned to their point of origin. While the Ebola risk level remains very high in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the overall global and Canadian risk levels remain low, according to the World Health Organization. There are currently no Ebola cases in Canada, according to Chief Public Health Officer Dr. Joss Reimer. An Ontario resident being monitored tested negative for Ebola after testing was conducted "out of an abundance of caution," Reimer said. Meanwhile, the Congolese national aboard the diverted Montreal flight showed no symptoms and has returned to their point of origin. At this time, there are no Canadian travel bans for countries affected by Ebola. However, the Public Health Agency of Canada has implemented enhanced border screening measures. Travellers entering Canada are being asked additional questions regarding recent travel to affected countries and whether they are experiencing symptoms. Early days of COVID followed similar protocol. Can cases appear in Canada. Yes, may they spread. Look what happened with COVID. You decide.

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