



HANTAVIRUS IN THE TANGIER-TETOUAN-AL HOCEIMA REGION:

Vigilance at points of entry and implementation of preventive measures

STRATEGIC SIGNAL

Moroccan authorities have launched preventative rat extermination campaigns in the ports of Tangier, Tangier Med, Tetouan, and Al Hoceima, as well as in certain airport facilities in the region. These operations are taking place amidst international health alerts surrounding Hantavirus, following the reporting of an outbreak on board a cruise ship in the western Mediterranean. With the approach of the summer season, marked by a significant increase in the flow of Moroccan residents abroad (MREs) and tourists transiting through the region's main entry points, this preventative mobilization reflects a proactive approach by health authorities. The region, in fact, accounts for a structurally high proportion of entry flows into Morocco, via Tangier Med, Tangier City, the northern ports, and regional airports, which justifies extended vigilance in logistics zones, warehouses, storage areas, rural and agricultural environments, as well as urban areas prone to rodent infestations.

HIGHLIGHTS

International outbreak identified: A cluster of Hantavirus Andes infections has been confirmed on board the cruise ship MV Hondius. As of May 14, 2026, the ECDC had identified 11 cases linked to this outbreak, including 8 confirmed, 2 probable, and 1 inconclusive, as well as 3 deaths. Exposed passengers have been transferred to their countries of origin and placed under medical observation or in preventive isolation, notably in Europe and the United States. This outbreak constitutes an identified imported risk, distinct from a localized health risk within Moroccan territory or a pandemic risk. According to the WHO and the ECDC, Hantavirus is transmitted through direct contact with infected rodents or by inhalation of viral particles, with no documented human-to-human transmission via direct respiratory contact, which differentiates this risk from pathogens with proven pandemic potential.

Targeted rodent control: Operations launched in the sewer systems, pipes, and sensitive areas of the ports of Tangier, Tangier Med, Tetouan, and Al Hoceima, as well as in certain urban neighborhoods.

No Moroccan nationals involved: To date, no Moroccan citizens are among those affected by the ship's infestation.

STRATEGIC READING : POSSIBLE IMPACTS

A) A region directly connected to Mediterranean flows: The region concentrates Morocco's main maritime and air entry points. As the summer season approaches, these infrastructures handle a considerable volume of travellers: in 2025, the port of Tanger Med recorded 3.22 million passengers, including 1.8 million Moroccans residing abroad during the Marhaba operation alone, representing 56% of national return traffic. On the air travel segment, Tangier's international airport recorded a 17% increase in passenger numbers. This concentration of flows, unmatched at the national level, represents a structural vulnerability in the context of an international health alert.

B) A risk of disproportionate panic that must be controlled: The rapid spread of misinformation can fuel a perception of risk that is disconnected from the actual health

situation, even though Hantavirus does not have the same modes of transmission as respiratory viruses.

For the region, this informational risk is tangible: panic fueled by social media can affect traveler confidence, the return flow of Moroccans residing abroad (MREs), and the tourist season. Crisis communication management and the fight against disinformation must be integrated into the preventative measures.

C) The proactive approach of the authorities, a positive sign: Preventative mobilization before any case is declared in the territory reflects a growing maturity in health monitoring systems since the Covid-19 pandemic. This responsiveness, in accordance with the International Health Regulations (IHR) 2005, protects the region's health reputation, a key asset for its attractiveness, and strengthens response protocols that are useful beyond Hantavirus alone for any future zoonotic risk.

STRATEGIC READING : POINTS OF VIGILANCE

Central scenario (situation under control): No cases reported in Morocco. Rat extermination operations continue according to the established schedule. Vigilance at points of entry is maintained at a heightened standard level, in line with the seasonal increase in traffic.

Adverse scenario (isolated imported case): A suspected case is detected at a point of entry into the region. The screening and isolation system established by the National Border Health Security Program is activated. Targeted preventative communication is launched to avoid any panic.

Critical scenario (local cluster or informational panic): Emergence of local cases without an established epidemiological link to an identified imported outbreak, or viral spread of misinformation generating public panic. Activation of the health crisis protocol in coordination with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection and the relevant authorities.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The alert cannot be reduced to a purely reassuring stance. The mobilization of health services and local authorities reflects a sound proactive approach. Five priorities are essential:

1. Coordinate rodent control operations between regional health services, local authorities, and managers of port, airport, and border infrastructure, extending coverage to logistics zones, warehouses, silos, and storage areas to ensure comprehensive treatment of sensitive sites in the region.
2. Develop a harmonized preventative communication strategy regarding Hantavirus transmission methods for travelers, tourism operators, healthcare professionals, and local authorities to limit the risk of misinformation, contain the spread of false information, and prevent panic.
3. Include rodent control in the specifications of management contracts for major regional infrastructure, beyond the current alert context and in conjunction with summer sanitation plans.
4. Implement a system of enhanced vigilance at the main entry points of the region during the high season, in coordination with the competent health authorities, the managers of the infrastructure concerned and in accordance with the International Health Regulations IHR 2005, with graduated thresholds: normal vigilance, enhanced vigilance, activation of a health protocol, crisis communication.

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