# PESTS

#### *What are the Health and Safety Risks?*

**P**ests are unwanted living creatures in or around a home. Pests can act as asthma and allergy triggers in sensitized family members and those with asthma or who are chronically ill. Inside of homes, mice, rats, and cockroaches may also trigger asthma attacks. Pests can be a health and safety hazard because they can carry bacteria in on their skin or fur, through biting humans, or by damaging home structure or components making the home unsafe.

Indoor pests include bugs or rodents that get inside and into food; mice and rats which can chew on electrical wires and cause fires; rats and certain spiders which can bite and make people very ill; and fleas and ticks which can be carried into a home on pets or clothing and can cause disease.

Bedbugs are tiny insects that feed on blood of humans and animals. They are hitchhikers and they can crawl onto children and adults or their belongings. Bed bugs are very difficult to get rid of once they have infested a room or area. Common bed bugs are not known to transmit disease but some people have allergic reactions to their bites.

#### ***Where Do Pests Risks Come From?***

Pests travel into a home looking for places with food, water and shelter. Removing their access to these things can greatly reduce pest problems. Families should be advised to ask these questions in order to identify the problem and possible solutions:

* Are there gaps or openings in the walls, doors or windows?
* Are pets bringing in pests?
* Is there spilled or open food anywhere in the home?
* Is there a water leak in or around the house?

Bedbugs can be carried home in luggage, bags or on clothing. They are most common in public places or where people sleep or travel. They can be found in homes, apartments, dorm rooms, hotels, cruise ships and in public transportation. Bed bugs tend to hide during the day and come out at night and they hide in bedding, furniture, cracks and tight places. If a family thinks they have bed bugs they will need to confirm it with a cooperative extension agent or health professional. If a family is renting the house they should immediately contact their landlord, and check with state or local laws regarding bedbugs.



**What can you do to help the families**

**and communities you serve?**

*Actions for Living in a Healthy Home*

##### Preventing or Controlling Pests Safely

##### Identifying pests and fixing the causes of pest problems is the first step families should take. First, families should try pest prevention and non-chemical tools like traps. Non-chemical products like traps are safer for people and pets.

Next, families should try to remove the conditions that allowed the pest(s) to enter and live. This system of removing pests is called **Integrated Pest Management** or **IPM**. IPM is an effective and environmentally sensitive approach to pest management that relies on a combination of commonsense practices. IPM programs use current, comprehensive information on the life cycles of pests and their interaction with the environment. This information, in combination with available pest control methods, is used to manage pest damage by the most economical means, and with the least possible hazard to people, property, and the environment.

##### IPM in Multifamily Housing

If a family lives in an apartment, a condominium, or any kind of unit in a multi-family housing complex, there are special measures that should be considered to prevent or solve pest problems. To keep pest numbers down, each resident needs to do his or her part, keeping individual apartments clean to discourage pests throughout the building. The apartment resident’s role encompasses these responsibilities:

* Prepare units for visits from a pest management professional or exterminator.
* Follow leases regarding housekeeping, sanitation, trash removal and storage.
* Report the presence of pests, leaks and mold.
* Monitor common areas for problems and help neighbors with these tasks.

##### Housekeeping and Maintenance

A stakeholder should encourage families to be diligent in finding out how pests are getting into their home and advise them to walk around the house from outside, and:

* Look for openings in walls, doors and windows, then sealing gaps where pipes and wires come inside. This is often where pests come in.
* Use screens on windows and repairing holes in screens.
* Make sure doors and windows are tight and well- sealed. (Mice can get in a hole the width of a pencil). Repair damaged doors and windows.
* Trim plants so they don’t touch the exterior walls,
* Avoiding large collections of trash.
* Keep gutters clean and use downspouts to direct water away from the home.
* Get rid of standing water in watering cans, toys, wading pools, buckets, cans, tires, and plant containers. Standing water breeds mosquitoes.
  + Repair openings in the roof and eaves which may let bats, bees and squirrels inside.

After an inspection from the outside, the family should be advised to proceed to inspecting the conditions of the interior, and routinely:

* + Clean countertops, floors, window sills, and other surfaces often.
  + Clean up spills and crumbs and dirty dishes right away.
  + Keep a tight lid on trash cans and emptying the trash daily.
  + Store food in tightly sealed containers. Pests are attracted to food in open bags, boxes or containers.
* Keep pests from getting water by fixing plumbing leaks and not leaving dishwater in the sink overnight.
* Get rid of clutter, especially newspaper, bags, papers, and cardboard boxes. Paper makes a good home for pests. Also, Roaches like the glue in paper bags and cardboard boxes.

##### Safe Pest Control Methods

Once clutter is removed, cracks and crevices are sealed, and a home is clean, THEN a family may be further advised on pest control methods the may still be needed. Families should always choose less toxic methods first and non-chemical methods of pest control are safest. Other suggestions to help families with pest management include:

* + Snap (not sticky) traps for mice. Mice or rats may stick to the traps but not die and remain a bite hazard.
  + “Child resistant” traps for roaches, ants or mice.
  + Avoiding the use of pesticides or rodenticides like pellets. Rodents can eat them and die inside walls and hidden places. Dead rodents smell bad and the smell can last for months, and children or pets may eat the pellets.
  + Fly swatters to kill flies, spiders or roaches. A vacuum cleaner can also remove them but the vacuum bag should be thrown away as soon as possible so the pests don’t get out.
  + Sealant, steel wool or other pest-proof materials to plug cracks. An “escutcheon plate” keeps pests out around pipe openings.
  + Not using products designed to be used outdoors inside a home.

##### Methods That Use Chemicals

Pesticides can cause health problems if not used properly. If the non-chemical methods do not work, it’s best for a family to call a certified pest management professional. Persons in the home should only use pesticides according to the label directions, and choose products that cannot be easily breathed, swallowed or touched by babies, children and adults. Children could easily become sick from contact with pesticides. Families should always keep pesticides in a locked cabinet and out of reach. It is vital that the person applying the pesticide uses only the amount of product that the instructions say to use. More is not better and can be very dangerous to persons and pets.

Residents planning on using chemical pesticides should review important information on recommended protection including:

* + Plastic or rubber gloves
  + Long sleeves
  + Long pants
  + Safety glasses or goggles
  + Dust mask or respirator

Families using pesticides should always be advised to wash hands after use and never smoke, eat, or drink while using the products. For more information on pesticide safety, the Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Pesticide Programs (EPA/OPP) supports the National Pesticide Information Center. The number is (800) 858-7378 and their website is: [www.npic.orst.edu](http://www.npic.orst.edu/).

Bed Bug Prevention and Removal

When returning home from travel or somewhere that may have had bed bugs, families should be advised to store belongings in sealed bags until they can be carefully inspected with a flashlight or magnifying glass. If bedbugs are found, non-flammable items and clothing should be immediately put in the clothes dryer on the highest heat setting for 30 minutes to kill them. Flammable items should be discarded, if possible. Clothing from a suitcase should be unpacked and put directly into a clothes washer and hot dryer.

Regular maintenance in a home to reduce the possibility of bed bug infestation includes recommendations to regularly wash and dry bedding and any clothing that touches the floor and throwing away the vacuum bag or contents right away after vacuuming.