

# Preventing Pests at Home

Is your family bugged by cockroaches, mice, or rats? You're not alone. Though many people believe pests are attracted to filthy areas, even the cleanest homes can have them.

Pests can cause problems once they move into a home; they eat or damage and contaminate food, smell bad, carry disease, and trigger asthma-related illnesses. Roaches also quickly multiply, making them difficult to control.

When pests pose a problem, one's first-response might be to grab the nearest insect spray or rat poison. However, families should think twice before using these products indoors. Products we use to control or kill pests in and around the home contain poisonous chemicals called "pesticides." If used incorrectly, household pesticide products can harm the health of young children.

Each year, thousands of children are poisoned or exposed to household pesticide products, but you can effectively control or kill pests without using dangerous chemicals. Like humans, pests need three critical elements to survive: food, water, and shelter. By following three simple and effective steps, you can protect your family's health and safety while eliminating annoying pests.

## Starve Them Out!

- Pests will eat just about anything, but they might leave you alone if they don't have easy access to food.
- Seal up boxes and bags of food. Roaches love cardboard boxes and can climb into these items with ease.
- Store open food in plastic bags or containers, such as cereal, flour, or sugar.
- Immediately clean up spills and leftover crumbs. Pests love free food left out in the open.
- Don't walk around the house while eating. Meals and snacks should be eaten at a table.
- Clean dirty dishes right away. Pests want whatever is left of your meals.
- Keep a tight lid on trash, and empty it often. It may be trash to you, but pests see it as dinner. Place trash dumpsters far away from a back door entrance.
- Don't leave pet food out overnight. People and pet food can stir up pests' appetites.

## Dry Them Out!

Although roaches can live up to one month without food, without water roaches can die in a week's time.

- Always drain dish water from a sink. Because roaches can swim, a sink full of water might become the site of a roach pool party.
- Wipe water and other spilled liquids off the counter as soon as you first see it. Puddles are roach magnets.
- Fix or report leaky faucets, radiators, dishwashers, and washing machines to a building manager.
- Empty excess water in flower pots and plant stands. A drop of water can be all a roach needs to feel satisfied.

## Keep Them Out!

By keeping roaches and rodents out of your home, you can prevent them from ever becoming a problem. Rodents spend most of their lives hiding. They love cracks, and can squeeze just about anywhere. Think smart, and they can't move in on you:

- Seal cracks and openings along baseboards, behind sinks, and around pipes and windows.
- Repair door and window screens with holes to prevent insects and other pests from entering a home.
- Check boxes and bags for roaches before bringing them into a home.
- Eliminate clutter, including stacks of newspapers, paper bags, and cardboard boxes. These make good hiding places for pests.
- Set traps to control rats and mice. If you use baits, make sure they are in a tamper-resistant bait station made of durable plastic or metal, and place in an area where children and pets cannot touch them.

If you call a pest control company, remember to ask the following questions:

- Do you have a pest control license?
- Before exterminating, can you tell me exactly what you will be doing?
- What chemicals, if any, will you use?
- May I read the pesticide product labels?
- Does the product target the pest I want to control or kill?
- Is there a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency number on the product?
- When will it be safe for me and my family to return home?

If you live in an apartment building or multi-family complex, encourage building or facility management to stop routine pesticide spraying and enlist the services of a certified pest control company that practices Integrated Pest Management (IPM). IPM is a less toxic approach to controlling or eliminating pests.