

Health Advisory



RODENT-BORNE DISEASES: RISK REDUCTION **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Rodents in Los Angeles County can pose a risk to human health. Surveillance conducted by the Vector Management Program has shown that rodents can carry viruses and/or bacteria that can cause disease in humans. These pathogens can be transmitted to people by various routes. Some are contracted by the bite of an infected rodent flea. Others can be transmitted by direct contact or inhalation of aerosols from infected rodents, their urine, feces, or nesting material. Examples of these pathogens include the causative bacteria of plague and murine (endemic) typhus, hantaviruses and arenaviruses. Additional surveillance has uncovered evidence of other organisms, which are currently under investigation, that have unknown human health implications.

To reduce the risk of exposure to these organisms, the Vector Management Program offers the following general recommendations:

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Maintain your property in a sanitary manner, so as to reduce the potential for rodents on the premises.
- Rodent-proof all structures, using durable materials such as 1/4 inch mesh metal hardware cloth or sheet metal. Check foundation vents, conduit/wall junctures and door thresholds. Eliminate all gaps greater than 1/4 inch.
- Reduce available food, water and harborage that can be used by rodents.
- Do not leave pet food out at night, and remove fallen fruit promptly. Thin vegetation and either remove cast-off items or elevate 18 inches above the ground to reduce harborage.

These recommendations are aimed at making the premises less attractive to rodents, thus reducing the potential for rodents to invade or occupy the premises. This will reduce the likelihood of encountering rodents, their feces, urine or ectoparasites.

RODENT CONTROL MEASURES

If an infestation does exist, take prompt and effective measures to eliminate the rodents. Since infestations can vary as to the species of rodent involved, the type, location and condition of the structure, and other factors, each situation should be evaluated separately. However, the following are some important points to consider when abating a rodent infestation.

- **Indoor:** In most cases, snap traps are preferable within a structure. The use of poison bait may cause a rodent to die in an inaccessible area within the structure, causing odors and nuisance vectors, such as flies.
- **Outdoor:** Properly applied approved baits can be effective in some situations, but adjacent structures should be properly rodentproofed before baiting. In a rural setting, the use of poison baits should be carefully considered, noting the potential impact on natural predators (i.e., hawks, owls, coyotes), and the limited long term efficacy of baiting large areas to reduce rodent numbers in such a setting.
- Because rodent fleas will seek another host to feed on after the rodent dies, fleas should be controlled in an approved manner prior to baiting or trapping, especially if plague or murine typhus is a concern where you live. California ground squirrels, deer mice and Norway rats are examples of rodents that can transmit pathogens through their fleas.
- **Always read and follow the instructions on the label of all pesticide products you are using.**
- **Keep baits, dead rodents, and traps out of the reach of children and pets to prevent accidental poisoning, injury or illness.**

SAFETY MEASURES

The following guidelines should always be used when controlling rodents and when cleaning rodent infested areas:

- Avoid contact with live rodents.
- Always wear rubber, latex, vinyl or nitrile gloves.
- Avoid disturbing contaminated material so as to prevent creating aerosols.
- A dust mask may provide some protection against dusts and other particles, but it should not be relied upon to protect against airborne pathogens. Special purpose respirators can provide effective protection when equipped with the appropriate filters and when properly fit-tested to the specific user.
- Open doors to unoccupied structures and allow them to air out prior to entering and cleaning.
- Disinfect snap-trapped rodents and any surfaces or materials contaminated with rodent droppings or urine, including nesting material, by wetting them down with a household or general purpose disinfectant. Use at maximum recommended concentration. Check the label on the container and follow any precautionary statements or warnings.

NOTE: If you are using household bleach (sodium hypochlorite) as a disinfectant, care should be used with bleach-sensitive materials, such as carpet and upholstery. A strong detergent or a non-bleach based disinfectant may be viable substitutes.

- Remove disinfected materials with a paper towel or cloth dampened with disinfectant and dispose of in a plastic trash bag and seal.
- Place disinfected materials (rodents, nests, towels) in a second plastic bag and secure. Dispose with other household wastes in a garbage can with a tight fitting lid.
- Lastly, disinfect and rinse gloves prior to removing them, and then wash your hands with soap and water.

In case of a heavy rodent infestation, especially in a confined area with low ventilation, contact the Vector Management Program for more information and recommendations.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have produced an excellent document that thoroughly covers rodent-proofing, safety precautions, occupational concerns, and other information. The document can be found on the CDC web site at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5109a1.htm>.

For help controlling rats or mice, contact:

Los Angeles County - Department of Public Health
Vector Management Program
5050 Commerce Drive
Baldwin Park, CA 91706
(626) 430-5450