

# Rodent Infestations

Rodents like rats and mice can ruin food and damage property. Rats and mice have similar features with mice generally having larger ears, light brown to dark grey fur with a lighter colour on their belly and can often be found in urban areas. Rats are larger than mice but prefer living in damp areas like crawl spaces or building perimeters.

## Health concerns

Both rats and mice can:

- Carry and transmit disease
- Carry fleas or ticks which can harm pets and humans
- Contaminate food with their hair, droppings and urine resulting in food poisoning
- Cause fires by gnawing on electrical wires or damage to buildings by chewing on insulation, siding and wallboard

## Signs of infestation

### Seeing live or dead rodents

Rodents are mainly active at night. Seeing live rodents in the daytime usually means there is either a heavy infestation, their nest has been disturbed (perhaps by construction), or new rats/mice are moving into the area and have not found a place to nest. It can also mean a small or medium infestation of rodents has developed a daytime feeding pattern in response to periodically available food (e.g. kibble being placed out for pets at a certain time every day).

A freshly dead rodent indicates an infestation, but an old, dried body may merely indicate a previous infestation.

### Droppings

Rodent fecal droppings are thin, black pellets often seen around feeding areas and nesting sites. Dry, old pellets can be a sign of past infestation, while moist pellets indicate a current infestation.

### Damage to goods and structures

Often, the first clear evidence of rodent activity is finding damaged packaging materials, partially eaten, spilled or hoarded food, or recent signs of gnawing. Rodents have incisors that never stop growing. To wear the teeth down, they gnaw on non-edible materials such as wood, household items, furniture and electrical cabling.

### Runs

Rodents tend to follow the same routes between their nests and food sources. They prefer to travel along edges, like the edge of the floor next to the wall, along pipes or rafters, or along the outside or inside of a foundation.



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## Noise

Both rats and mice can be heard making squeaking, gnawing, scraping sounds or running noises within the walls, ceilings and cupboards.

## Tracks

Rats and mice can leave foot prints and tail swipes on dusty surfaces and smears on walls where they travel.

## Burrows

Rodents create underground pathways or burrows from their nest to food sources and to escape predators. These burrows are often located under bushes or close to sheds.

## Rodent control

The following measures can be taken to control and prevent rodent infestations.

### Clean it

- Keep gardens clean and tidy. Cut tall grass and weeds back from your house and in your garden
- Do not plant flowers and shrubs close to your house and ensure there is about eight inches of space under plants
- Remove any discovered nesting sites in unused clutter around your house, garage and sheds
- Remove unused piles of lumber, old tires and old structures from your property
- Do not store old furniture and cars outside
- Store firewood, lumber and garbage cans off the ground
- Keep all garbage in rodent-proof containers, metal or plastic, with tight-fitting lids

- Properly maintain compost and keep it away from the house
- Remove fallen fruits and nuts in your garden
- Provide bird feeders with trays and clean spilled seeds often
- If you have a bird bath, keep it clean
- Do not leave pet food outside overnight
- Keep your kitchen clean. Store dry food and dry pet food in metal or glass containers

### Seal it

- Keep doors closed
- Cover ground floor and basement windows and all vents with metal screening or steel mesh
- Repair cracks in cement footings and foundations; seal any openings larger than ¼ inch. **A rodent can squeeze through a hole the size of a nickel!**
- Build sheds on concrete slabs
- Inspect your house to ensure there are no holes around central heating pipes and plumbing pipes
- Equip floor drains and sewer pipes with tight-fitting grates that have openings less than ¼ inch in diameter
- Correct leaky taps and pipes and faulty drains. Eliminate other sources of water available to rodents
- Stuff steel wool around pipes before caulking and plastering



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## Trap it

- Several types of traps are available on the market. Carefully read the instructions before purchasing and setting traps
- Do not place traps near children, food preparation areas and pets
- Check traps daily to remove dead rodents
- If the infestation is out of control, call a pest control company
- If trapping does not get rid of the rodents, try baiting stations (small trays with rat poison). Allow three to four days for rodents to become comfortable with baits. Use strong-smelling sticky foods like peanut butter, bacon grease mixed with oats or raisins to attract them.

## Call a pest control company to find out which chemicals are best to use

## Dispose it

- Avoid touching dead rodents with your bare hands. Wear waterproof rubber gloves or use a shovel
- Put into a doubled garbage bag
- Wash your hands with soap and warm water after handling
- Follow local municipality waste disposal guidelines

For more information, contact York Region Health Connection.



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