

Health & Housing: Rats & Mice

Overview

Rats and mice are rodents that enter homes through cracks and holes in walls, floors, or any points of entry such as doors, windows, and pipes. These rodents can enter through extremely small openings.¹ Mice will inhabit areas inside the home, and rats tend to dwell underneath buildings and in attics. While it is more common for mice to infest homes, if there are many points of entry into a building rats may also be present in large numbers.

Common rodents in Texas include the house mouse, Norway rat, and the roof/black rat.²



Mouse Characteristics:

- Large ears
- Short-haired coat with light colored bellies
- Roughly 3-10 cm in length
- Long, thick tail covered in hairs
- 1-2 mm long, pointed droppings.

Rat Characteristics:

- Small ears
- Thick, hairless tail
- Large feet
- Roughly 16-40 cm in length
- Banana-shaped, dark colored droppings

Signs of infestation:

- Droppings
- Streaks or smears across lower portion of walls (caused by rodents rubbing up against the wall as they run through the home)
- Tracks in dusty areas
- Small paths created through dusty areas or in areas outside of the home
- Squealing and movement sounds coming from walls, attics, and other dark areas



Health Impacts

Rodents can impact health in several ways. People typically come into direct contact with rodent saliva, urine, droppings, or by breathing air contaminated with microscopic particles of

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2010). *Seal Up!* https://www.cdc.gov/rodents/prevent_infestations/seal_up.html

² Texas A&M Agrilife Extension. (2013). *Managing rats and mice.* <https://agrillifeextension.tamu.edu/library/wildlife-nature-environment/managing-rats-and-mice/>

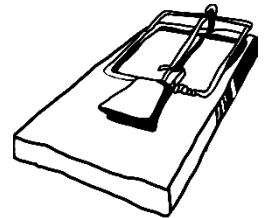


these substances. The presence of rodent allergens in a home can trigger asthma attacks in a person with rodent allergies.³

Typhus fever (a disease with symptoms of headaches, rash, fever, and chills) and Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (a severe respiratory disease) are also linked to rodent exposure.^{4,5} Both of these illnesses are rare; all household members should be monitored for both allergic and disease symptoms.

Immediate Actions

- Notify the property manager immediately
- Eliminate food sources by:
 - Cleaning kitchen thoroughly and keeping any other area where food is consumed free of crumbs
 - Storing food in chew-proof sealed container (including pet food)
 - Frequently removing trash from the home.⁶
- Place traps along the walls, as rodents prefer to run alongside walls rather than run out in the open. Be sure to take proper precautions when using traps. Follow the manufacturer's instructions and do not allow children or pets near the traps.
- Peanut butter, frosting, or any other sticky foods you already have in the home are good bait to spread on the traps.
- Check traps frequently. Remove dead rodents, place in a plastic bag, and dispose of in an outdoor trash can or dumpster.⁷
- **Do not use glue/sticky traps.** They draw out the rodent's pain and can actually increase the spread of disease due to fearful urination.⁸
- Promptly dispose of dead rodents. Wear gloves and place dead rodents in tightly sealed plastic bags. Be sure to disinfect the area surrounding the trap.⁹



Long-term Management

- Holes, including very small ones, inside and outside the building should be sealed. Unsealed doors, windows, ventilation, and electrical appliances are all common modes of entry for rodents.
 - Seal small holes with steel wool and caulk.
 - Seal large holes with cement or metal sheeting.
- Any areas with leaking water need to be repaired. It is essential to cut off rodents' supply to water.
- Frequently clean your home and remove any potential food sources for rodents.

³ National Center for Healthy Housing. (2021). *Rodents health impacts*.

<https://nchh.org/information-and-evidence/learn-about-healthy-housing/health-hazards-prevention-and-solutions/rodents/>

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). *Flea-borne (murine) typhus*. <https://www.cdc.gov/hantavirus/hps/index.html>

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2013). *Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS)*. <https://www.cdc.gov/hantavirus/hps/index.html>

⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2009). *Healthy Housing Reference Manual. Chapter 4: Disease Vectors and Pests*.

<https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/publications/books/housing/cha04.htm>

⁷ TEXHALE Texas Home Assessment of Asthma and Lung Exposures. (2020). *Mouse allergy and asthma*.

⁸ Centers for Disease Controls and Prevention. (2010). *Trap up!* https://www.cdc.gov/rodents/prevent_infestations/trap_up.html

⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2019). *Cleaning up after rodents*. <https://www.cdc.gov/rodents/cleaning/index.html>

- Dispose of trash frequently to prevent it from building up in or outside of the home. This includes regular dumpster maintenance. An overflowing, poorly maintained dumpster can negate the work of tenants and attract rodents to the building.¹⁰

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) combines several methods to eliminate rodent infestations and prevent re-entry into a home or building. IPM involves locating and sealing open spaces that serve as entryways into the home, setting traps, and maintaining a sanitary environment. Rodenticides are only used if non-chemical techniques do not eliminate the problem, and should only be applied by professionals with proper credentials wearing personal protective equipment.^{18,11}



This report was compiled by Community-Driven Initiatives and the Center for Health and Environment: Education and Research (CHEER) at Dell Medical School at The University of Texas at Austin, in collaboration with Building and Strengthening Tenant Action (BASTA).



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¹⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2010). *Clean Up! Clean up rodent food sources and nesting sites.* https://www.cdc.gov/rodents/prevent_infestations/clean_up.html

¹¹ Texas A&M Agrilife Extension. (n.d.) *IPM action plan for rodents.* <https://schoolipm.tamu.edu/forms/pest-management-plans/ipm-action-plan-for-rodents/>