



Controlling Rats and Mice

Guidance on Preventing and Mitigating Rodents in Your Home

The Snohomish County Health Department (SCHD) provides information on the controls of pests, such as rats and mice. Please note that SCHD does not have a pest control program and does not take pest complaints.

Types of Rats in Western Washington

The Norway rat (also known as the brown rat, sewer rat, or wharf rat) and the roof rat (also called the black rat) are the two rats commonly found in Washington.



Norway rat



Roof rat

The Norway rat averages 16 inches in length, including the animal's long, tapered, scaly tail that is slightly shorter than the combined length of the rat's head and body. Norway rats are grayish-brown in color from top to bottom; white, black, or mottled individuals are occasionally found.

The roof rat is similar in length to the Norway rat, but are slendrer and darker. The tail is longer than the combined length of the head and body. As one of their names implies, roof rats are agile climbers and are found on roofs and in the upper levels of buildings.

Rodent Prevention

For rodent traps and bait stations to be effective, all food sources should be removed.

- Store pet and people food, bird and lawn/garden seed, and animal feed indoors in containers with tight fitting lids.
- Clean up food waste and use thick plastic or metal garbage cans with tight lids.
- Remove shelter such as cardboard, wood piles, bushes, vines, tall grasses, rockeries, old furniture, appliances, and junk.
- Don't put food scraps in open bins or compost piles. Routinely mix compost piles to encourage rapid decomposition.
- Clean up fallen fruits or nuts from trees and animal waste.
- Store firewood, lumber, or hay at least 12 inches off the ground and away from your home.

Rodent Proofing Your Home

Seal all gaps and holes into your home or outbuildings. Mice can squeeze through openings as small as a quarter of an inch. The following areas should be inspected for gaps:

- Inside, under, and behind cabinets and appliances.
- Around doors, windows, and the foundation.
- Attics, crawl spaces, dryers, and floor vents.
- Around fireplaces and garage doors.
- Around pipes and holes for electrical, plumbing, cable, and gas lines.
- Crawl space entry points.
- Between the inside floor and wall juncture.
- Among roof rafters, gables, and eaves.

Using Bait Stations

- If you are using poison to control rodents, you must follow the directions on the label.
- Poisons are not recommended for rat control inside buildings. Poisoned rats can die in hard to reach places and cause a bad smell.
Always secure poison in bait stations so that it is not available to children, pets or wild animals.

Choosing a Pest Control Operator

Some rodent problems may be too extensive to control on your own and you may need to hire a professional pest control service. When working with a professional pest control company for rodent control, be clear about what you want done and monitor their performance.

Pest control professionals can be found by looking online. Inquire about “integrated pest management” or “IPM” services. IPM methods often use less poison and employ other techniques to control pests. A pest control operator should inspect, monitor and make recommendations for excluding rodents. Interview companies and ask for references, including previous customers.

Ask to see their license. All pest control companies should be licensed and registered with the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA). Washington pesticide law requires most businesses that commercially apply pesticides to be licensed as a Commercial Applicator.

- WSDA Pesticide Licensing and Structural Pest Inspector licenses are available for look up online at <http://agr.wa.gov/pestfert/licensing/search>

How to Dispose of Dead Rodents

- Do not touch dead rodents with bare hands.
- Use gloves if possible. If gloves are not available use the inside of a plastic bag or shovel.
- Injured or sick rodents must be killed. Wrap the dead rodent in newspaper or place in a plastic bag before putting in a tightly covered garbage can.

Notes: _____

Deer Mice and Hantavirus

The deer mouse is the main carrier of hantavirus in the western United States. Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) is a severe, sometimes fatal respiratory disease. Deer mice are most common in rural settings but live in all parts of Washington. A person may be exposed to hantavirus by breathing contaminated dust after disturbing or cleaning rodent droppings or nests, or by living or working in rodent-infested settings.

Always assume deer mice are carrying hantavirus—even those that appear healthy. Take care to wear personal protective equipment (PPE) and follow proper cleaning procedures when handling droppings, nesting materials or rodents. Scan the QR code below to learn about cleaning procedures:



Deer mouse



<https://doh.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2024-02/420569-SafelyCleaningAfterRodents-Hantavirus-Poster-English.pdf>



<https://www.snohd.org/197/Rodents-Pests>

Information in this flyer adapted with permission from Public Health—Seattle & King County