



HEALTH NEWS FROM DR. YU

Thurston County Public Health & Social Services Department

Rats!

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Rats and wild mice are unwelcome visitors to our homes. They can spread disease, destroy things in our homes, and start fires by chewing electric wires. The first strategy to avoid problems is to keep rodents out of your space.

Seal out rats and mice by covering openings larger than one quarter of an inch with rodent-resistant materials such as one-quarter inch hardware cloth (wire mesh), concrete, sheet metal, brick, or mortar. Regularly check for cracks or openings around the foundation, attic, vents, and places where pipes or cables enter the building. Add a sheet metal collar around pipes to seal off the space between the pipe and the wall. Keep the space under doors less than one-quarter of an inch. Cover the edges of doors with metal to prevent gnawing.

Discourage rodents by removing food sources, nesting, and hiding places.

Rodents need food, water, and nesting sites in order to thrive and reproduce. Killing rats and mice without also reducing food and nesting sources does not work for long. Rats do not like to travel far, typically nesting, traveling, and feeding within a 250-foot radius. Focus efforts within 250 feet of your area of concern.

Keep food, including pet food and birdseed, in rodent-proof containers. Either do not feed pets outdoors or remove food dishes promptly after feeding. Clean up spilled birdseed or stop feeding the birds. Birds toss what they do not like, so feeding seed birds prefer cuts down on spilled seed. Keep garbage cans covered tightly and empty regularly. Line compost bins with one-quarter inch hardware cloth.

Keep firewood, ivy, brush, and other materials away from buildings to reduce hiding places for burrows. Cover fiberglass insulation from areas accessible to rodents. From a mouse or rat's perspective, insulation is a perfect nesting area. Rats can climb and burrow. Keep shrubs two or three feet away from walls and roofs. Tree branches should be six feet away from roofs, eaves, attic vents, and utility wires. Add a strip of heavy, rough gravel two feet wide and six inches deep next to building foundations and walls.

Trap mice or rats with snap-traps. Rodent poisons are slow-acting. Rodents often crawl into the wall and die, leaving a smelly, difficult clean-up problem. Traps are effective. Place traps along walls or rafters where rodents regularly travel. Place several traps in a row with the triggers toward the wall, or two traps with their long ends against the wall and triggers each outward from one another. This makes it more likely to catch the mouse or rat even if they jump. Check and empty traps daily and add fresh bait as needed. If there is no activity after three or four days, move the traps. Dispose of trapped rodents by double bagging and placing in the trash, wear gloves.

Finally, work with neighbors and other community members. While mice can be a single household problem, rats are community problems. It may take a community effort to reduce food and nesting sites for rats.

- For more information, see the Washington State Department of Health website:
www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/Zoo/rodent.htm

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