

## Rodent Infestations – What Employees Need to Know

Rodents, such as rats and mice, are known to carry a variety of diseases and tend to group in areas such as storerooms, personal service rooms, storage facilities, exteriors, the surroundings of buildings, and garbage since it is a food source. They have been responsible for more human illnesses and deaths than any other group of mammals.

This fact sheet provides an overview of some of the hazards that uncontrolled rodent infestations can present to workers, along with some prevention and control measures.

### The Hazards

#### Disease:

Some diseases can spread from rodents to people through direct contact with infected rodents (including their skin flakes, urine, and feces), such as breathing in contaminated air, touching contaminated materials and then touching eyes, nose, or mouth, being bitten or scratched by an infected rodent, or eating food contaminated by an infected rodent.

Other diseases can spread from rodents to people through indirect contact. This can occur when people are bitten by ticks, mites, fleas, and mosquitos that have fed on infected rodents.

- Diseases and reactions can vary depending on the type of rodent.
- Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS), Leptospirosis, Plague, and Salmonella are some of the diseases.
- Dead skin flakes, urine, and feces can trigger asthma attacks in sensitive individuals.



#### Hazardous Chemicals:

Employees may be exposed to chemicals when cleaning areas where rodents are found. Some of these chemicals can present significant inhalation, eye, and skin hazards to workers if they are not used properly, including suitable exposure control measures.

### Hazard Prevention and Control

#### Employers are required to:

- Keep workplaces, storerooms, personal service rooms and passageways clean, orderly and in a sanitary condition, to the extent the nature of the work allows.
- Ensure the interiors, exteriors and surroundings of buildings that contribute to a hazard are cleaned and maintained in such conditions that will not give rise to harmful exposures. Cleaning and sweeping must be done in a manner that minimizes contamination of the air and, to the extent feasible, avoid harmful employee exposures.

**“Harmful exposure”** includes inhalation of airborne contaminants that result in, or have a probability to result in injury, illness, disease, impairment, or loss of function.

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- Prepare and maintain, to the extent feasible, every enclosed workspace and personal service room to prevent the entrance or harborage of insects, rodents or other vermin.
- Ensure rotting waste is stored in receptacles that do not leak and can be thoroughly cleaned. Receptacles must be maintained in a sanitary condition, with a tight-fitting cover if they cannot be maintained in a sanitary condition without one.
- Ensure all sweepings and waste are removed to avoid creating a nuisance, and removed as often as necessary to avoid unsanitary conditions.
- Ensure employees are trained on and made aware of the hazards of any cleaning chemicals they are required to use, and provided the necessary hazard control measures such as eye, skin, and respiratory protection, where needed. This includes ready access to Safety Data Sheets (SDS) corresponding to the chemicals they may be exposed to.
- Provide personal protective equipment and training to employees who manage, capture, or dispose of rodents.
- Implement an effective written injury and illness prevention program (IIPP), as well as other safety & health programs, to reduce your risk of exposure to these hazards and prevent injuries and illnesses in the workplace. This includes:
  - Identifying and evaluating workplace hazards and correcting unsafe or unhealthy working conditions.
  - Providing effective training and instruction on the hazards and safe work practices specific to each work's job assignment, in a language the worker understands, including hazards presented by the presence of rodents and their control if applicable to the workplace.

## Resources

### Cal/OSHA

- [3203. Injury and Illness Prevention Program.](#)
- [3362. General Requirements](#)
- [5194. Hazard Communication Program](#)

### California Department of Public Health

- [Hantavirus Infection](#)

### Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

- [Hantavirus](#)
- [Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome - United States: Updated Recommendations for Risk Reduction](#)
- [How to Control Wild Rodent Infestations](#)

### Los Angeles County Department of Health

- [The Norway Rat in Downtown Los Angeles](#)
- [Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome \(HPS\)](#)

### OSHA

- [Hantavirus - Overview](#)

All workers have a right to a safe and healthful workplace, regardless of immigration status, and may file confidential complaints about workplace safety and health hazards with Cal/OSHA. Workers with work-related questions or complaints may contact the Cal/OSHA Call Center in English or Spanish at 833-579-0927.

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This document is available with active links at [www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/dosh\\_publications](http://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/dosh_publications)

For assistance regarding this subject matter, employers may contact

**Cal/OSHA Consultation Services** at 1-800-963-9424 or [InfoCons@dir.ca.gov](mailto:InfoCons@dir.ca.gov)

[www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/consultation.html](http://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/consultation.html)

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