

LHO GUIDE: RODENTS



Rodents (such as rats, mice and chipmunks) are known to cause damage to structures and can also carry diseases transmissible to humans. Rodent-borne diseases can spread directly through handling, through contact with droppings, urine or saliva; and through rodent bites. Rodents can also spread disease indirectly when people breathe in air contaminated with rodent waste or eat contaminated food. Rodents can also carry ticks, mites, or fleas that can spread disease.

While transmission of rodent-borne diseases is not common, the diseases can be serious. Diseases known to be transmitted directly by rodents include Hantaviruses and Salmonellosis; those transmitted indirectly include the tick-borne bacterial Lyme disease and anaplasmosis. Infestation of rodents in and around the home is the main reason disease spreads from rodents to people and potential infestation should be considered a public health threat.

When you receive a complaint



Hear complaint, ask informational questions as indicated.

Information to obtain could be:

How long has issue been present ?

What signs of rodents or rodent infestation are present ?

What does the complainant think is the cause of the infestation

(ex: food, trash, holes in structure, moisture, unknown)

If a rental property, has the landlord/owner been notified, when/how ?

What steps have already been taken by renter and by landlord/owner ?

(ex: is an inspection already planned or completed? Any treatments/mitigation steps taken?)

Are there especially vulnerable individuals living in the home (ex: children, elders) ?

What is the complainant looking for from LHO or town; what is next step requested ?



Provide public health education as needed:

Relevant points might include:

- **Rodent-borne illnesses in humans are not common but can be serious**, and rodent infestations constitute a threat to public health.
- **How to determine if rodents are present:** ex: droppings, nesting materials, signs of gnawing
- **Viruses are usually transmitted by inhalation** from stirred-up fresh droppings or nesting materials; **therefore, avoid vacuuming or using a broom to clean up** rodent droppings or nesting materials as that can send particles airborne.
- **Importance of notifying landlord/owner if renter;** include information about signs of rodents and known or visible holes & gaps that might need to be sealed; include photos if possible; sample tenant letters to landlord can be found on Pine Tree Legal's site [here](#).
- **Improperly contained trash** can create an environment conducive to infestation and itself can constitute a potential public health threat to residents and/or neighbors; resident should do their part to keep area free of rodent attractants (food, water, shelter).
- **Integrated pest management (IPM)** is the recommended approach to management of many pest problems including rodent infestation; it combines different management approaches. IPM aims both to mitigate current problem *and* rid the area of the food, water, shelter that attract and harbor rodents, to prevent recurrence and future problems. IPM also aims to minimize treatment danger to humans or animals.
- **How to find a qualified pest management company** if applicable.



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Inspection / complaint verification



Inspection notes to resident / owner:

- Determine whether a qualified pest management company visit/ inspection of the location is already planned, either hired by the landlord/owner or resident/renter.
- If you will be doing the initial inspection, let the renter or owner know what to expect during an inspection visit in general terms.
- Let them know that if you discover or suspect that an infestation is severe, you will defer to a qualified professional pest management company to complete an inspection.
- Let them know you will be taking photos to document the problem.
- Let them know *per routine* you might visit with a municipal colleague, such as the code enforcement officer and/or police officer (if indicated).
- **Obtain consent to enter premises and inspect; notate consent in your record.**



Safety during inspection - considerations

- If possible, do not respond alone. Inspect as a team with a municipal colleague, if possible, a building code expert (ex: CEO, Firefighter). Bring law enforcement if you have any concerns.
- For minor problems, take appropriate precautions to protect yourself, which can include wearing an N95 mask and gloves, and avoiding contact with rodent urine, feces or nesting materials. Avoid stirring up materials to make them airborne (avoid sweeping and vacuuming).
- If you discover or suspect that an infestation is severe, defer to a qualified professional pest management company to complete an inspection.
- Bring municipal identification;
- Bring a camera;
- Keep notes (with a checklist if possible) as you inspect.

Additional Resources

Public health resources

Consult your District Liaison for assistance

Selection of rodent resources for LHO reference and education for the public can be found on the Maine CDC's online [LHO Resources](#) page and include:

[Got Pests? pages of Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry \(DACF\)](#)

[Controlling Wild Rodent Infestations \(CDC\)](#)

[Hantavirus \(Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome\) \(Maine CDC\)](#)

[How to clean up after rodents \(CDC\)](#)

Statutes that might apply

Consult your municipal attorney for assistance

[Title 14 Section 6021](#) Implied Warranty and Covenant of Habitability

[Title 22 Section 1561](#) Removal of a Private Nuisance

[Title 22 Section 461](#) Notice to owner to clean premises; expenses on refusal

[Title 22 Section 252](#) Penalties

[Title 22 Section 451-A Powers and Duties.](#) Local health officer duties

[Consumer Rights When You Rent an Apartment \(Maine Attorney General's Office\)](#)

Relevant local codes or ordinances

See Complaint Response – Sample Process (Overview) for more.

When responding to a potential public health threat, if you and your municipal colleagues need additional technical support you can reach out to your Maine CDC Public Health District Liaison (find your DL [here](#).)

