

# Controlling rats and mice

A guide to preventing  
infestations and  
getting rid  
of them



*Basingstoke  
and Deane*

# General information about rats and mice

The house mouse and the brown rat are common rodent pests. We all have a responsibility to ensure that our homes, gardens and local environment are kept free from rodents.

Rats and mice breed very quickly. A pair of rats can produce several litters a year, with each litter producing about eight young. The offspring mature three months after birth and breed at the same rate.

Rats are efficient burrowers and can burrow for several metres horizontally. Both rats and mice are good climbers and can climb vertical walls if the surface is rough enough, and “shimmy” up between walls and drain pipes. Rats are also reasonably good swimmers and have been known to enter premises through the water-traps of the toilet bowl.

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## Why do we need to control rats and mice?

There are three main reasons rodents must be controlled:

1. they can transmit many diseases to humans, including salmonella (food poisoning) and Weil’s disease (see below)
2. they contaminate food and food preparation surfaces
3. they cause damage by gnawing woodwork, water pipes and electric cables (which can cause house fires).



## Weil's disease

This is a serious and sometimes fatal infection that is transmitted to humans by contact with urine from infected rats. The infection can get into the human body through cuts and scratches and through the lining of the mouth and eyes after contact with infected urine or contaminated water.

Anyone who is exposed to rats or comes into contact with canal and river water is at risk.

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## Disease prevention

To prevent disease from rodents:

- Do not touch rodents with unprotected hands. Waterproof gloves should be worn when handling anything which may have been in contact with rodents.
- All cuts and broken skin should be covered with waterproof plasters.
- Always wash your hands thoroughly after handling any animal or any contaminated clothing and especially before eating, drinking or smoking.
- All utensils and surfaces with which rodents may have had contact should be thoroughly washed and disinfected.



## How can I prevent rat and mice infestation?

You have a legal responsibility to ensure your property is free from vermin. Householders can assist in preventing an infestation by taking a number of simple precautions:

- keep your home in good repair; rats only need a gap of 15mm to access buildings
- remove potential nesting sites by keeping yards and gardens clean and tidy, and by cutting back overgrown areas
- ensure drain covers are in place and in good repair
- seal gaps around heating and water pipes
- ventilation bricks and slots should already have a fine wire mesh protection. If this is worn, replace it externally with 3.15mm insect mesh.
- do not leave household waste where rats can get to it, close dustbin and composter lids
- if you have a compost heap position it on a hard surface such as on open jointed bricks, paving slabs or a fine steel mesh which will allow the liquids to drain away. Visit the Recycle Now website [www.recyclenow.com](http://www.recyclenow.com) for further information
- secure any gaps beneath your external buildings such as sheds and garages with galvanised wire mesh
- follow simple precautions when feeding wild birds - see below.

## Should I feed wild birds?

Feeding birds in gardens has become widespread and is valuable in conserving bird numbers, particularly in the winter months. However, the numbers of rats and mice in built up areas is considered to be on the increase and unsuitable bird feeding methods may be a significant reason for this. If you feed birds please follow these guidelines:



- do not scatter food on the ground
- do not put food on a bird table
- do not throw unwanted food waste into your garden;
- do use bird feeders with a catch tray to stop debris falling on the floor
- do ensure feeders are sited with care and suspended from metal wire
- do place small quantities in feeders daily to ensure they are emptied daily.

If you see rats or mice in or near your property you should stop feeding the birds

For further information visit the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds website [www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk).

## How will I know if I have rats or mice?

You may not actually see any rats or mice, but you will almost certainly see the traces they leave:

**Holes** - rat holes are about 80mm in diameter and are usually found outside in compost heaps, under sheds, in hedge banks and similar places. Inside buildings the rat makes nests in wall cavities or under floor boards.

The house mouse is generally a pest found only inside buildings. Mouse holes are easily distinguishable by their smaller size, about 20mm in diameter.

**Runs and smears** - rats and mice tend to use certain routes regularly when they travel to and from their nesting sites, and so create pathways or “runs”. Indoors on hard surfaces the runs are less clearly defined, but become marked in places by black greasy smears.

**Droppings** - the number of droppings, their position and age may help to identify where rats and mice are abundant, and where they are moving and feeding. Common rat droppings are between 10 and 20mm long and often found in runs. Mice droppings are like very small rat droppings, about the size of a grain of rice.

**Signs of damage** - signs of damage include gnaw marks, half-eaten food and damaged packing. The more rodents there are, the more damage you will expect to see.



## How can I get rid of rats and mice?

To see if you qualify for the council's free rat removal service please visit [www.basingstoke.gov.uk](http://www.basingstoke.gov.uk) or telephone 01256 844844.

Rats and mice are adaptable, highly mobile and breed rapidly to produce large infestations. This can make their control difficult for the untrained individual and we recommend that, if you do not qualify for the council's free service, you employ the services of a reputable pest control contractor approved by the British Pest Control Association - [www.bpca.org.uk](http://www.bpca.org.uk) or telephone 01332 294288.

However, if you decide to carry out the work yourself there are two main options, poison or break back traps:

Poison (rodenticide) can be bought from most hardware stores and garden centres. Put the poison in a safe and secure place out of reach of children and pets and always wash your hands after use. Rodenticide can take 4 to 12 days to take effect, and may result in a localised foul smell due to the presence of carcasses.

Warning: When using any pesticides always follow the instructions on the label. Remember that pesticides may be harmful to other animals. The use of bait boxes can restrict other animals accessing rodenticide. Do not put rodenticide on your bird table.

Break-back traps should be placed next to walls where rats tend to travel. The trap should be baited with chocolate, biscuit or cereal. Most rats are wary of new objects placed in their environment and will avoid them for a period of time. So do not set the spring on the trap until bait has been eaten then re-bait and reset the trap. Use several traps and examine them daily, removing dead rats as soon as they are discovered. All traps should be handled with care and placed so that household pets and children cannot access them.

If after two weeks of self treatment there is still evidence of rodent activity you should employ the services of a reputable pest control contractor.

## Where can I get further information?

If you need any further help or advice please contact the council's Environmental Health team by emailing [pollution@basingstoke.gov.uk](mailto:pollution@basingstoke.gov.uk) or by telephoning 01256 844844.

