

# Health Information – Rats

Rats and mice are almost always present throughout cities and suburban areas due to the opportunities for food and shelter afforded by human activity. In established suburbs, food and water is readily available from such places as drainage and irrigation systems, vines, fruit trees, palm trees and pet food. Rodent numbers (like those of many wild animals) fluctuate according to a number of factors, but rats will always be present at a background level.

Rats are considered a nuisance because of the damage they can do to buildings as well as the odours created by their colonies.

## Signs of rats

The following signs indicate the possible presence of rats:

- droppings—these are oblong and between 12 to 20mm in length. When found in cupboards, window ledges, alongside skirting boards or in sheds, this is usually the first sign of a rat infestation. Shiny, dark, pliable droppings are an indication of recent rodent activity
- remains of snail shells with the insides eaten out, nutshells, bones, seeds and other debris in the corner of sheds and other private spots
- greasy rub marks on vertical surfaces from continual contact with rodent fur
- signs that fruit and vegetables from gardens have been eaten
- gnawing damage in a wide range of materials including wood, soft metals, soap, food containers, conduit and cables
- squeaking, gnawing or movement sounds in walls, cupboards, ceilings and under floorboards
- pets becoming more excitable than usual
- footprints and tail marks on the ground or along dusty surfaces
- nests hidden in buildings made from rags, paper, cardboard, straw and other materials.
- removing fruit and nuts from vines and trees at the end of the season and picking up rotten fruit from the ground
- removing fruit from palm trees when in season
- keeping the backyard as clean and free of debris as possible
- maintaining rubbish and compost bins in good repair, free from holes and with secure lids
- keeping pet dishes clean and storing bulk pet food in closed containers
- regularly removing garden waste and rubbish from sheds and around the yard
- regularly cutting back tree branches and palm fronds to prevent easy access to the gutters and roof
- blocking holes and other potential access points around all buildings
- upturning unused containers exposed to the weather so they do not collect rainwater.

## Rodent control methods

Baiting and trapping are the two most common ways of controlling a rat problem.

Baiting involves laying poison baits along rodent paths, and in roof and wall cavities that are easily accessible. Many brands of bait are available at supermarkets and hardware stores. You should read the packet instructions and, once laid, check the baits regularly to see if rats have been eating them.

However, some rat baits may present a risk to native wildlife through the unintended consequence of secondary poisoning, that might occur when native wildlife feed on rats or mice that have eaten rat bait. To reduce the risk of secondary poisoning, 'Second Generation Anticoagulant Rodenticides' (SGARs) should be avoided. SGARs often contain ingredients such as rodifacoum and bromodialone.

When placing the rat bait in the roof cavity, place the bait within sight of the access hole so the baits can easily be checked.

## Preventing Rat Problems

The presence and number of rats is determined by the availability of food, water and shelter. By denying the rodents these lifelines, you can effectively control rat populations. You can do this by:

- stacking wood above the ground (about 40cm) and away from sides of sheds and fences

A starter pack of the recommended rat bait may be collected by City of Joondalup residents from the Customer Service Centre in the Administration Building (90 Boas Avenue, Joondalup). There is a limit of one pack per household per year.

It is very important to place baits where small children or pets cannot reach them.

If an alternative to poison baits is sought, trapping is the next most common way of ridding any premises of rats. There are two different types of traps—the old-fashioned snap-back trap and a plastic capture box. Different types of bait can be used, including bacon rind, chocolate, fish, nuts, prunes, apples or peanut butter. Rats are sometimes suspicious of new objects or surroundings so they may stay clear of the trap until it becomes familiar. Placing the trap in the path of a rat and hiding the trigger under straw or cardboard is one way to get around this trap shyness. To avoid contamination by urine, droppings or blood, traps should never be set above food or food preparation surfaces.

## Rat facts

A rat can:

- fall 15m without hurting itself
- swim 800m
- tread water for three days
- jump 1m vertically and 1.2m horizontally
- wriggle through a hole one-quarter its own size
- gnaw through lead and aluminum sheeting
- produce up to 15,000 descendants in a year.

**Owners and occupiers of premises are required by law to prevent the harbourage of rats.**

Should you need any further advice on rats, please contact the City's Health and Environmental Services on **9400 4933**.

## Further information

You may also wish to visit the following websites:

Department of Agriculture and Food  
**[agric.wa.gov.au](http://agric.wa.gov.au)**

Department of Health  
**[healthywa.wa.gov.au](http://healthywa.wa.gov.au)**