

Insects, Rodents and Pests

THO Manual | August 2026

Although insects, rodents and other pests are generally not considered significant threats to human health, in some instances they can spread disease. When insects, rodents, and other pests do become a significant nuisance or a threat to public health, it's best to hire a professional certified by the [Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets](#) to remove them. In addition to using professionals, consider these tips when addressing a pest problem:

1. Remove food and water sources: Removal of such sources (garbage, improperly stored foods, etc.) will help reduce or prevent infestations.
2. Fix entry points into the building: Identify and repair any possible entry points like cracks in a building's foundation and gaps under doors to prevent pests from entering.

If you need help accessing or understanding this information, contact AHS.VDHTHO@vermont.gov.

Town Health Officer Role

You may need to respond to an insect, rodent or other pest problem as a THO. Although infestations do not usually fall under THO jurisdiction, they may present a threat to public health in your community. Here are some examples:

1. Improperly stored garbage/waste at a property that is affecting others in the area through a widespread rodent or other pest infestation.
2. Insect, rodent and other pest infestations within a rental property.

If you are unsure whether rodents or insects pose a public health problem, contact the Health Department's Infectious Disease Section at 802-863-7240 for clarification.

Bed Bugs

You may need to inspect and investigate a bed bug infestation. Bed bugs are small (adults are approximately 1/4 inch in length), wingless insects that feed on blood from warm-blooded animals. Adults are straw-to-reddish-brown in color. They are usually active at night when people are sleeping. Bed bugs bite, but they are not known to transmit disease. However, people may experience allergic reactions or secondary infections due to excessive scratching.

In addition to being very tiny, bed bugs' bodies are flat and oval-shaped, allowing them to hide easily in cracks and crevices, such as those in bed frames and mattresses. Bed bugs

can live for several months without food or water and are easily transported on furniture, luggage and bedding. Bed bugs can also travel between adjoining rooms through cracks in the walls and openings made for pipes and wiring.

Bed bugs painlessly feed on their host, injecting a tiny amount of saliva in the process, which can result in mild to severe allergic reactions. Many people do not react to bed bug bites. Scratching bites is highly discouraged because it can lead to secondary infections. Antihistamines and corticosteroids can be prescribed by a doctor and used to reduce allergic reactions and inflammation.

How can I tell if there is bed bug infestation? These are signs of bed bugs:

- Feeling bug bites at night
- Seeing bloodstains, reddish/brown fecal spots, egg casings or shed skin on bedding
- A strange, sweet-smelling odor
- Finding bed bugs or eggs in the cracks and crevices of bedding or mattresses, desks, dressers, beneath loose wallpaper, or in the pleats of curtains.

The best way to **confirm a bed bug infestation** is to:

- Remove sheets from the bed.
- Look for bloodstains on and under the mattress.
- Fold back the mattress seam and look under for bed bugs or the exoskeletons they leave behind when they molt.
- Inspect other areas such as behind peeling wallpaper, in wall cracks, box springs, bed frames, and headboards. If a small crack is present, push a straightened paper clip into the opening to see if any bed bugs crawl out.
- Bed bugs don't jump, so it is unlikely that they will get on your clothes.
- If you find bed bugs, a professional pest control company can confirm an infestation.

What do I do if a bed bug infestation is confirmed? Management depends on the extent of the bed bug problem. Here are some guidelines:

- Encase individual mattresses and box springs in covers.
- Seal crevices and cracks with caulking.
- Repair or remove loose wallpaper.
- Put linens and other soft items in a dryer on high heat (140°F) for 30 minutes. High heat can kill bed bugs.

- The Health Department recommends primarily using heat treatment to get rid of bed bugs in homes. Pesticides may be needed to treat specific areas or materials that heat cannot treat. If you must use pesticides, hire a licensed pest control professional. Pesticides must be used properly to be effective and to avoid harming human health.

How can bed bug infestations be prevented? Encourage people to be cautious of discarded furniture, mattresses, or clothing left on the street. Items bought at garage sales or second-hand stores should be inspected and cleaned before bringing them into the home. Luggage should be inspected after travel. It is important to reduce the number of places for bed bugs to hide by avoiding clutter.

Integrated Pest Management

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is a safer, effective and environmentally friendly way to control pests. IPM is a common-sense approach that can be used to deny pests food, water, shelter and a way into homes. This method minimizes the use of hazardous pesticides by first understanding a pest's life cycle and how the pest interacts with its environment to figure out the best ways to control the problem. Then you can use safer pesticides if you must use chemicals. Learn more on the [Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)](#) website.

Pesticides

Pesticides can kill insects, rodents, unwanted plants, bacteria and viruses. Pesticides can be hazardous to people and pests if used incorrectly. Exposure to pesticides can cause health problems like skin irritation and burning, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, respiratory problems, cancer, memory and concentration problems, paralysis and even death.

The [Pesticide Programs](#) at the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets are responsible for making sure pesticides are properly used and sold throughout Vermont. This includes certifying commercial and private pesticide applicators and investigating pesticide complaints (e.g., improper application). Read the [Vermont Rule for the Control of Pesticides](#) online.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) also regulates pesticides. The EPA evaluates pesticides thoroughly to ensure that they meet federal safety standards to protect human health and the environment. Find more information, including about specific pesticide ingredients, at epa.gov/pesticides.

Contact:

- Contact the Vermont Agency, Food and Markets' [Pesticide Programs](#) for questions about pesticides.
- Learn more about pests and download the [Pests in Your Home fact sheet](#) on the Health Department's [Pest and Bed Bugs webpage](#).