

Health Information Regarding Rats in Homes

Public Risk of Health Issues from Rats is Very Low in Jefferson County

Like many rodents and small mammals, it is possible for rats to carry diseases. However, rats do not generally pose a public health risk in Colorado, and at this time, there are no known diseases associated with the rat population in Jefferson County, CO. Rats are more of a nuisance than a public health concern.

What Can You Do About Rats in Your or Your Neighbors' Homes?

If there is a rat infestation in your neighborhood, the most important thing you can do is control rats in and around your own property.

- First, inspect all areas inside and outside of your home that might provide rats with a place to hide or build a nest, such as crawlspaces, sheds, woodpiles and undisturbed boats, RVs and vehicles. In addition to looking for rats, while you are inspecting:
 - Look for any holes or openings in your home and/or outbuildings that are larger than the size of a nickel. If you see openings, [seal them](#) to prevent gnawing and access.
 - Remove any food from pet dishes, pet waste or uncovered garbage.
 - Pick fruits and vegetables from gardens and be sure to pick up any fruit from trees that may fall on the ground.
 - Neighbors with chickens or other animals allowed in your neighborhood should identify effective ways to keep feed and water away from rodents while still properly caring for your animals.
 - Be sure to empty pet watering bowls and, if you see evidence of rats on your property, be sure to empty rain water from any containers and drain ornamental ponds and fountains until the rat issues are resolved.
- If you find signs of rats, use rat snap traps to quickly and humanely kill rats as they attempt to eat the bait. There are several advantages to using snap traps (as opposed to poisons):
 - They provide a quick solution for trapping rats.
 - Using traps will minimize the chances of decomposing rodent odors and fly problems.
 - Most mechanical traps can be reused many times.
 - They are nontoxic, which means they are less likely to harm children, the environment or other animals
- Although it takes patience and strategy, snap traps are an effective and a nontoxic method to eliminate a rodent infestation. However, it is important that rat traps are used safely to ensure that people — particularly children, pets and non-target animals — do not accidentally encounter the traps. When placing traps

indoors, place traps in darkened corners, along walls or behind appliances and objects. Use similar techniques when placing traps in outdoor locations. If you trap rats yourself, be sure to use gloves and double bag the carcasses before placing them in the trash. Wash your hands thoroughly after handling a dead animal.

- You may wish to hire a professional to install traps. But, ensure that you understand the principles for effective trapping and don't assume that a pest control service will use these techniques unless you require it when you hire them.
- Poison baits or rodenticides, which are pesticides that kill rodents, are not recommended because of the risk to children, pets, non-target animals (such as hawks or other birds of prey, coyotes or bobcats) and environmental concerns. Rodenticides can also harm pets or non-target animals by "secondary poisoning," where the pet or animal preying on a poisoned rat is also poisoned. An example is when a cat, dog or bird of prey eats a rodent that is dying or has been killed by rodenticides.

Additional Resources

For additional information about rodent control, including how to clean up after rats, please visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/rodents/index.html>.

You can also contact Dave Volkel, Environmental Health Specialist at JCPH, at dvolkel@jeffco.us or 303-271-5730.

For additional information about rats, please visit <https://www.jeffco.us/3671/Rats>.

About Jefferson County Public Health

Public health is what we as a society do collectively to prevent illness and premature death and promote health in our neighborhoods and communities. Jefferson County Public Health (JCPH) is a nationally accredited health department committed to promoting and protecting health across the lifespan for all people through prevention, education and partnerships. To learn more about JCPH, visit <https://www.jeffco.us/public-health>. You can also follow JCPH on Twitter [@JeffcoPH](https://twitter.com/JeffcoPH), Instagram [@JeffcoPH](https://www.instagram.com/JeffcoPH) and Facebook [@jeffcopublichealth](https://www.facebook.com/jeffcopublichealth).