

VERMIN-MANAGING RATS IN YOUR HOME

Public Health Act 2005
Public Health Regulation 2018

Rats can pose a serious health risk by assisting the transmission of diseases such as leptospirosis, dysentery and gastro-enteritis. They can also damage buildings by gnawing on materials such as wood, soft metals and electrical wiring.

The most common pest rat in domestic situations in Townsville is the Black Rat (*Rattus rattus*). Despite its name, the Black Rat is usually brown or grey in colour. Its tail is longer than its body, and its ears are large enough to fold down to its eyes. The Black Rat is an agile climber and is often found in ceilings.

Rats are usually, though not exclusively, nocturnal and may not be seen unless they are very hungry or present in large numbers. They are opportunists with a variable diet depending on what is available.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE RATS?

Rats may be detected by:

- » The presence of droppings. These are black and torpedo shaped and between 10mm and 18mm in length.
- » Eaten foods. Foods which are usually left in sheltered areas. These may include fruit seeds, nuts and foods available about the house.
- » Damage to food containers or other materials that may be caused by rats trying to reach sources of food or gnawing to control the growth of their teeth.
- » Rat runs. These are paths on the ground or greasy rub marks against the floor or walls formed by the repeated travel of rats over the same areas. Rat runs may be traced back to the rat's shelter.

HOW CAN I DISCOURAGE RATS?

Rats can be discouraged from your property by making the environment unfavourable to them. This takes long term control measures of eliminating sources of food and shelter and should ideally be conducted in cooperation with neighbours whose properties may also support rats.

You can reduce food sources by:

- » cleaning pet and poultry food dishes and storing foods in tightly closed rat proof containers
- » placing rubbish and food scraps in rat proof bins (compost should be maintained in rat proof compost bins and should be free of meat products)
- » removing ripened or fallen fruit from trees and the ground.

You can reduce shelter by:

- » clearing the property and any sheds of disused materials such as timber or building materials
- » keeping grass and vegetation cut short
- » blocking potential entry points to your buildings such as holes in wall linings
- » stacking materials off the ground (recommended 300 mm minimum).

HOW CAN I GET RID OF RATS?

Rats may be killed by baiting or trapping. However, this will most likely provide only a short term solution to remove rats that are already present on a property.

Baits:

- » can be purchased from most hardware stores and many supermarkets
- » can be very effective, however they must be used with extreme care and according to label instructions to avoid accidental poisoning of children and animals
- » should be placed in sheltered bait stations that prevent accidental access to the bait and encourage the rats to stay and eat the bait in a protective environment
- » are available in pre-made bait stations from commercial pest control suppliers
- » may cause the rats to die in the house resulting in an unpleasant odour for a few days.

Rat traps:

- » may be purchased from hardware stores, some supermarkets and commercial pest control suppliers
- » come in many different varieties but the commonly used break-back trap is simple to use and has the advantage over poison baits in killing the animal almost instantly
- » can use a range of different lure types including peanut butter, apple, pumpkin seeds, meat or fish
- » should be placed in sheltered locations where the rats feel comfortable feeding and they will not be encountered by non-target species such as birds, lizards and native mammals

PROFESSIONAL RAT CONTROL

If these methods are unsuccessful in controlling your rat problem, you may need to consult a professional pest controller. Pest controllers have a wide range of equipment, knowledge and experience and can provide a thorough rat control service.

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HOUSE HOLDER OBLIGATIONS

Under the *Public Health Regulation 2018*, property owners must ensure that they:

- » seal or cover any holes or gaps in the exterior surface of the structure
- » securely fit a cover, grate or plug in any covered pipes or drains, including any disused pipes or drains
- » remove any disused pipes or drains
- » not destroy, damage or remove a screen or other object that has been fixed to a relevant structure to stop rats and mice entering the structure
- » not harbor mice and rats on the land
- » ensure that the land is not a breeding ground for rats and mice.

MORE INFORMATION

For more information, visit the Townsville City Council website townsville.qld.gov.au or call Council's Customer Service Centre on 13 48 10.