

RATS – Fact Sheet

Biology and Behaviour

Rats are a hazard to public health. They can transmit several diseases which can be fatal to humans, such as Weil's disease and Murine Typhus. They also carry disease organisms such as Salmonella bacteria, viruses and parasite such as worms and fleas.



In an urban environment rats readily find food from a variety of sources such as, **food waste thrown on the ground, poor management of feeding wild birds in gardens, poorly contained refuse** from commercial and domestic premises, drains and sewers.

Rats will burrow, especially into soil, compost heaps, under paved areas such as patios and sheds. Service pipes such as Gas and water are also at risk with rats burrowing under foundations undermining buildings and other structures. Rats can be frequently found living inside buildings in cavities between walls and roof spaces or under piles of rubbish, near water or in drains and sewers. Due to the rats ability to squeeze through small openings it can be difficult to keep rats out of buildings without some form of proofing (sealing up) of gaps and holes.

Rats must continuously **gnaw** as **their incisor teeth continuously grow through the whole of their life**. Their incisor teeth are extremely strong and sharp so they can penetrate materials such as hard woods, concrete, lead and aluminium. This can result in expensive damage and even can lead to **fires** with a risk to public safety when **electric cables are damaged**.

Rats can breed very quickly a healthy female can produce **5 litters a year** each with between **6 and 8 young**, with these offspring attaining sexual maturity in **8 to 12 weeks**. At any time it is estimated that as many as **30% of female rats** in a population may be **pregnant**.

It is very easy for infestation of rats to build up without ever noticing or seeing a rat. Their nocturnal habits tend to keep them away from the human contact. If a rat is seen during the day it can be an indicator of an infestation.

Signs of infestations are: droppings, gnaw (teeth) marks, runs and smear (grease) marks which is produced by their continuous rubbing of their fur against surfaces, (leaving a dark mark).

What can you do to prevent an infestation?

There are many issues that cause infestations of rats. Listed below are some items that are worth checking to make sure that an infestation is less likely;

- **Ensure** that any broken air vents are replaced.
- **Ensure** that all holes in walls are sealed with a suitable material (concrete)
- **Ensure** that any defective drainage is promptly repaired such as broken drain pipes and inspection chambers covers
- **Ensure** that your rubbish/waste is placed in an approved bin with a good fitting lid
- **Ensure** that any compost heaps/bins is properly maintained (rats can burrow into compost heaps or under bins)

- **Place** food intended for garden birds on a bird table or approved feeder, **do not** place food for birds directly onto the ground

Removing **easily accessible food and eliminating shelter** for rats are among the most basic and important factor to prevent an infestation.

If you find signs of an infestation for example rat droppings, gnawing marks, smear marks **take immediate action** to control the infestation. If you request a baiting programme to eliminate rats for the programme to be successful it is **vital** to maintain an uninterrupted supply of bait. This can only be achieved by **ensuring that all revisits appointments made with the pest control team are kept**.

You must not **interfere or reposition** any baits laid as part of a treatment programme and **you must keep all children and pets** away from bait stations at all times.

If you decide to treat an infestation yourself **do not** leave rat bait down for extended periods, remove baits as soon as the infestation has been controlled, this will **reduce** the risk of rodenticide resistance.

If a baiting programme is to be successful

- It is vital to **maintain** an uninterrupted supply of bait for the rat.
- **Do not** interfere with the position of the baits and,
- Keep **children and pets away** from baits at all times

If you find you cannot treat or control the infestation yourself please contact the City Council's Pest Control team.

For further information, advice and treatments please contact

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PO Box 595
Bristol
BS99 2BR

Tel: 0117 922 2500

E-mail: pest.control@bristol.gov.uk