



County of San Diego

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND QUALITY

FOOD, WATER, AND HOUSING DIVISION

OPERATOR GUIDANCE - RODENTS: HOW TO RESPOND?

The Department of Environmental Health and Quality (DEHQ) protects public health and safety by implementing the Food Safety Program that is responsible for the oversight of all retail food facilities within the county. As part of retail food facility operations, when an imminent health hazard is observed, like the presence of rodents, steps need to be taken to protect the health of the public.

If a food facility operator observes evidence of a rodent infestation within their facility, they must immediately stop food service and work to resolve the issue prior to reopening their business to protect the general public from diseases caused by the presence of rodents within a food facility.

Should evidence of rodents be observed during an inspection by DEHQ staff, the facility will be ordered closed until the facility has taken the proper steps to correct the problem and another inspection is conducted to verify compliance.

STEPS TO ELIMINATE RODENT ACTIVITY AT YOUR FACILITY

Do not call for a re-inspection until all of the following items have been completed:

1. Pest Control - Eliminate Rodent Activity Safely and Quickly

Licensed pest control service is a necessary part of eliminating a rodent infestation. While you could try eliminating the problem yourself, complicated issues such as rodent activity are best left up to professionals that can treat your facility quickly and most importantly, safely. Rodenticide is very poisonous, and trapping can be very difficult, so it is important that you contract with a certified pest control operator licensed with the State of California. You can find lists of certified pest control companies in your local directory. All rodents must be eliminated prior to requesting a reopen inspection.

If you already have a service company under contract, call them and let them know that you need their services to abate a rodent infestation at your facility. A certified pest control company will inspect the facility to perform/determine the following:

- Identify the type of rodent (mice or rat).
- Assess possible entry points and suggest repairs to exclude rodents.
- Locate hiding/nesting areas and provide recommendations for cleaning the facility and the removal of clutter and food and water sources.
- Treat your facility, monitor for rodent activity, and provide documentation of the services.

Your DEHQ inspector will request to see the pest control receipts of service during any re-inspection to reopen your facility.

2. Remove Evidence of Rodent Activity, Clean and Sanitize the Facility

Rodents may transmit diseases directly from exposure to their feces, urine, saliva, or indirectly transmit disease by fleas, ticks, or mites from their fur.

When cleaning up after treatment for a rodent infestation, be sure to clean up rodent urine, droppings, nests, dead rodents, and rub marks within the facility. Discard food items damaged by gnaw marks and any potentially contaminated foods as well as any items that cannot be cleaned and sanitized, like disposable tableware or napkins. Ensure all food contact surfaces and non-food contact surfaces are properly washed and sanitized. All cleaning must be completed prior to requesting a reopen inspection.

3. Eliminate Harborage Areas Associated with the Infestation

Once all rodent activity has been successfully eliminated, and all evidence has been removed through thorough cleaning and sanitizing, it is important to take steps to prevent reoccurrence. Remove clutter and unused equipment, and eliminate gaps in the walls, ceiling, shelving, or other deteriorated surfaces that can serve as future harborage areas and pose a barrier to effective pest control. Proper exclusion work must be completed prior to requesting a reopen inspection.

4. Conduct a Self-Inspection of the Facility

Once licensed pest control treatment has been completed, the facility is thoroughly cleaned and sanitized, all vermin proofing measures have been completed, and all holes, harborage areas, or entry points have been sealed, the next step is to conduct a self-inspection of the facility.

Using a flashlight, look around all food and beverage preparation areas and dish washing areas for signs of rodent activity such as droppings, nesting, grease/rub marks, and/or actual live or dead bodies. Look underneath and behind all equipment, in corners, and inside cabinets. Once you have verified that there is no further evidence of infestation within the facility, contact your area inspector to schedule a re-inspection. If you are unable to contact your inspector, you can reach the Specialist on Duty at 858-505-6900 and your request will be routed to the area inspector. During the inspection, if any evidence of rodent activity is observed, the facility will need to remain closed and the above steps will need to be repeated until no evidence exists, and the facility can be safely reopened to the public.

SAVE TIME AND MONEY

If you have not completed the above items, **DO NOT REQUEST A RE-INSPECTION**. The assigned EHS Inspector will not be able to approve the facility to re-open unless all the actions listed above have been completed. Repeat inspections will be subject to additional re-inspection fees.

INFESTATION PREVENTION STEPS

The Food Facility Manager or Person in Charge is responsible for conducting initial and ongoing food facility assessments to ensure consistent compliance with food safety requirements and for training employees to prevent future rodent infestations. To maintain a rodent-free facility, it is important to routinely complete the following procedures:

- Inspect all deliveries and refuse any products that appear to be damaged or contaminated by rodents.
- Regularly and thoroughly clean your facility to remove accumulated food residues, debris, and water sources for rodents.
- Store food inside rodent-resistant containers/equipment.
- Regularly repair and maintain your facility to eliminate possible harborage for rodents.
- Keep doors closed at all times.
- Properly store food waste and rubbish in leak-proof and rodent proof containers.
- Routinely inspect your own facility and look for signs of rodent activity.
- Contract and maintain a monthly service with a certified pest control operator with options to increase frequency of treatment as needed.
- Communicate regularly with your pest control company. They typically complete treatment while no one is present, so it is important to ensure they provide a receipt with notes and that you call them after a site visit to communicate about their findings and if there are any specific areas that need more cleaning or holes that need to be sealed, etc.
- Train staff to identify evidence of rodents and implement a policy to ensure they report their observations to management.
- If evidence is observed, immediately close the facility and take the necessary steps to remove the rodent infestation from the facility prior to reopening to the public.