



Cockroaches Fact Sheet

What are roaches?

Cockroaches are insects, flattened from top to bottom, usually with two pairs of wings folded flat over the back. Most species rarely fly but they can run up to three miles an hour. The color usually varies from light brown to black. The species vary from 2-3 mm to over 80 mm in length. At night they search for food in kitchens, food-storage areas, trash cans, drains and sewers. About 3,500 species of cockroaches exist worldwide, with 55 species found in the United States.

Where are roaches found?

German cockroaches (*Blattella germanica*), the most common cockroaches found in the United States, prefer sites close to moisture and food, and are commonly found in kitchens, bathrooms, and food-service areas. American cockroaches (*Periplaneta americana*), prefer dark moist sites where they feed on decaying organic matter. They are found in basements, kitchens, cloths hampers, drains, and bathroom plumbing or sewers. *Supella longipalpa*, the brownbanded cockroach, requires less moisture than others, and may be found behind pictures, in furniture, the underside of chairs and tables, in upper kitchen cabinets, and on the upper shelves of closets and pantries. Oriental (*Blatta orientalis*), smokybrown (*Periplaneta fuliginosa*), and ficed (*Blattella vaga*) cockroaches live outdoors but occasionally come inside.

Do roaches spread disease?

Although little evidence exists to link the cockroach to specific disease outbreaks, it has been demonstrated to carry *Salmonella typhimurium*, *Entamoeba histolytica*, and the poliomyelitis virus.

What health risks do roaches pose?

Cockroaches are considered an allergen source and asthma trigger for humans. Some cockroaches produce a repulsive odor that can be detected in infested areas. The sight of cockroach can cause considerable psychologic or emotional distress in some individuals. They do not bite but do have heavy leg spines that may scratch.

For further information, contact the Oklahoma City-County Health Department:
(405) 425-4437

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What are the signs and symptoms of cockroach infestation?

Cockroaches are primarily nocturnal, so daytime sightings may indicate potentially heavy infestations. Their feces will be visible during an infestation, the quantity of which oftentimes is a good indicator of the level or duration of infestation. Some species produce unpleasant smells. In events of serious infestation, a strong oily or musty odor may be present. Bodies of dead cockroaches can be found throughout the house. Egg cases, known as oothecae, are sometimes sighted behind furniture and in other hidden locations.

How do I get roaches?

Finding cockroaches in the house may not be a sign that the house is dirty. Even if you clean regularly and maintain a tidy home, roaches can usually find food and water which allow them to thrive in many environments. They can crawl inside through small holes and cracks in the building; hitch a ride on bags, backpacks, suitcases and other containers; find openings around doors and windows; and move from one apartment to another through pipes and holes in shared walls.

How are roaches treated and prevented?

There are four management strategies for controlling roaches. The first is *prevention*. This strategy involves inspecting items being carried into the home and sealing cracks and crevices in kitchens, bathrooms, exterior doors, and windows. The second strategy is *sanitation*—this denies roaches food, water and shelter. This includes quickly cleaning food particles from shelving and floors, timely washing of dinnerware, and routine cleaning under refrigerators, stoves, furniture, and similar areas. Pet food should be stored in tight containers and not left in bowls overnight if pets are fed indoors. Cockroach traps can be used to capture roaches and serves as a monitoring device. This is called *Trapping*. These traps can be placed against vertical surfaces, primarily corners, under sinks, in cabinets, basements, and floor drains. *Chemical control* is the fourth strategy and it involves the use of insecticides. Before using any insecticides, always read the label and follow directions and safety precautions.

Resources

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