

Cockroaches

Cockroaches in the home are a health hazard because of:

- Risks posed by cockroach antigens to asthma sufferers,
- Can carry disease-causing germs,
- Some of the methods traditionally used to eliminate cockroaches like pesticides can cause additional health hazards.

Health Impacts

Traditionally, cockroaches were controlled because they are offensive, leave behind a bad smell, and can cause gastrointestinal and respiratory illness.

Asthma trigger: Research shows that cockroach debris (old shells, saliva, body parts, and droppings) triggers asthma attacks in people who are sensitized to cockroach antigen (proteins found in the debris). In homes where several allergens are present, including dust mites, mold, furry pets, tobacco smoke, and certain chemicals, children may experience asthma attacks from high airborne concentrations of these allergens. Because young children spend more time indoors, allergens found in homes and other buildings pose a significant health risk for asthma sufferers.

Reducing Exposure

Any home can have cockroaches. There are steps you can take to prevent cockroaches from becoming a problem in your home. General maintenance and cleaning are important because they remove the food, water, and shelter on which cockroaches depend, and block the entrances cockroaches use to get into housing. Here are some steps you can take:

- Wipe off counters, tables, and stovetops after all meals, snacks, and food preparations.
- Keep food confined to specific areas of the house and clean any spills immediately.
- Keep all food and garbage in tightly sealed containers, and do not allow trash to accumulate too much.
- Do not leave dirty dishes in the sink, on the counter, or in the dishwasher overnight.
- Fix leaky pipes, faucets, toilets, and other plumbing problems, as well as leaky roofs.
- Use a bathroom fan that vents to the outside after all baths and showers to reduce humidity. Dry any damp areas in the kitchen or bathroom to keep moisture down.
- Remove all piles of boxes, cardboard, newspapers, etc. from both inside and around the home. Cockroaches can both live in and eat these materials.
- Remove other clutter as well to eliminate shelter and hiding places for cockroaches.
- Caulk all cracks and crevices throughout the home around systems such as plumbing, electrical, and gas lines, as well as in places like cupboards and walls.
- Pesticide sprays and fogs should not be used to control the problem. The insect sprays and fogs can be hazardous to human health and are not effective against cockroaches. Work with a professional before using pesticides.