

Mice

While we all love that wonderful cartoon character Mickey Mouse, the thought of having live mice inside your home or commercial building is not something we look forward to. Mice are perceived as dirty little creatures and while they probably aren't any dirtier than those cute little chipmunks you see outside... they still can carry disease, and cause all sorts of problems within the confines of four walls.

One of the main problems faced from having a mouse in your house is their contamination of food with their urine and feces. Their gnawing on wood, paper, cloth, books and insulation on electrical, TV, and computer network wiring can also pose a real threat for any homeowner or business owner. This can be noted by observing gnawed areas which leaves paired tooth marks about 1/8 inch wide. Another telltale clue is seeing mice droppings which are rod-shaped and about 1/3 to 1/4 inches long. Mice can also consume considerable quantities of stored seed and grains from farmers and granaries. But before we go any further, let's look at some pictures:



The above pictures show a typical Deer Mouse on the left, and a House Mouse on the right. The second picture from the left shows how mice built a nest inside a ordinary PC, and the next picture shows how mice will gnaw their way into a structure.

HOUSE MOUSE or FIELD MOUSE?

If you've seen mice in your home or business, the quick way to identify whether it's a house mouse or a field mouse is the white underbelly of the field (deer) mouse. House mice have been living among humans in this country since the first explorers and pilgrims arrived. They usually never live outdoors. These mice are exceedingly prolific breeders; as many as 13 litters can be produced in one year. The number of young per litter averages about six. The gestation period is approximately 19 days, varying from 18 to 20. On the other hand, field mice spend at least half the year outdoors in their nests, and once the weather turns cooler, they will attempt to gain entry to a building for the warmth, shelter, protection, and food that can be realized inside. Mice are normally thought of as slow, but when they need to move fast, they have been clocked at up to 12 feet per second. Blink your eyes... 12 feet.

What about Hantavirus?

Hantaviruses are a family of several viruses found in rodents. These viruses have caused serious health problems in other parts of the world (mainly the Far East, Scandinavia, and Eastern Europe). The virus causing the recent U.S. cases is a Hantavirus strain that seems to be unique to North America. This new strain attacks the lung and causes a disease called Adult Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS). While it was originally thought to be localized to the SW corner of the country, there have been cases reported on the east coast as well as the northeast. Rough 50% of all the 250+ reported cases in the USA were fatal. The virus is thought to be mainly carried by a common rodent, the deer (field) mouse (*Peromyscus maniculatus*). This mouse is native to most of the U.S. including Massachusetts. Infected rodents shed live virus in saliva, feces, and urine. Humans are infected when they inhale dust that contains dried rodent urine or feces. Transmission may also occur when dried materials contaminated by rodent feces are disturbed and directly introduced into broken skin or the eyes, nose, or mouth. Insect bites and household pets are not thought to play a role in hantavirus transmission. Squirrels, birds, hamsters, and rabbits are not known carriers of the hantavirus. There is no evidence of person-to-person transmission of the hantavirus. If you find areas where there are mice droppings, do not vacuum up the droppings. Instead, use rubber gloves, and use a dampened paper towel to pick up all the droppings. Then, you can spray the area with a mixture of bleach and water and wipe it down. Only then should you use a vacuum in that area.