



Pesticides

Where Are They Found?

Pesticides are potential hazards in many buildings because they are widely used to reduce many household pests, including those associated with indoor plants, pets, and wood and woolen products, and because they are tracked in from the outdoors. Pesticides used in and around the home include products to control insects (insecticides), termites (termiticides), rodents (rodenticides), fungi (fungicides), and microbes (disinfectants). They are sold as sprays, powders, crystals, balls, and foggers. Pesticides are produced specifically because they are toxic to specific organisms. Consequently, they have risks as well as benefits, and it is important to use them properly.

Surveys show that 75 percent of homes in the United States use at least one pesticide product indoors per year. Those most often used are insecticides and disinfectants. However, studies suggest that 80 to 90 percent of exposures to pesticides occur indoors and that measurable levels of up to a dozen pesticides have been found in the air inside homes. The reason for this discrepancy is pesticides can get into the air in homes from other sources, including contaminated soil or dust that floats or is tracked in from the outside, stored pesticide containers, and household surfaces that collect and then release fumes from the pesticides.

What Are the Health Effects?

The health effects associated with pesticide exposure can include irritation to the eyes, nose, and throat; damage to the central nervous system and kidneys; and for some an increased risk of cancer. Exposure to high levels of cyclodiene pesticides, usually due to misapplication, may cause headaches, dizziness, muscle twitching, weakness, tingling sensation, and nausea. Some believe these pesticides might cause long-term damage to the central nervous system and the liver. Since the main ingredients in pesticides can be organic, they can also affect vision and memory.

In 2006, the [American Association of Poison Control Centers](#) reported that 96,811 people were exposed to pesticide; 45,848 were ages 5 or younger. In households with children, almost one-half stored at least one pesticide product within reach of the children.

How Can You Reduce Exposure to Pesticides in Your Home?

To reduce risks when you are using pesticides, take these precautions:

- Buy only legally sold, EPA-registered pesticides.
- Reread the directions on the label each time you use the pesticide and follow the directions carefully. Use only the amount directed, at the time and under the conditions specified, and for the purpose listed.
- Use nonchemical methods of pest control when possible.

- Identify the pest and use a pesticide targeted for that pest.
- Ventilate the area during and after pesticide use.
- Dispose of unused pesticides safely.
- Anyone considering the use of a pest control company should receive satisfactory answers to questions about the company's track record, insurance coverage, licenses, affiliation to professional pest control associations, and the proposed treatment. Questions regarding pesticide use and safety may be referred to the **National Pesticide Information Center** at (800) 858-PEST.