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Public Health

COCKROACHES

AN UNWANTED HOUSEGUEST

What are cockroaches?

A cockroach is an insect that loves to live in peoples' homes. It likes to hide until dark, then come out and eat and drink. There are two main types of cockroaches that live inside our homes: the German cockroach (*Blattella germanica*) and the Brown-banded cockroach (*Supella longipalpa*). Both can spread disease by tracking what they have walked through on food and food preparation areas. Dust from their body parts and waste can make asthma worse and even cause asthma in preschool-aged children. The dust can also make allergies worse.

German cockroaches are about $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch long, brown with "racing stripes" running down their bodies behind their heads. They like to live where it's warm and wet, so kitchens and bathrooms are favorite hiding spots.

Brown-banded cockroaches are smaller, about $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch, with bands that run side to side on their bodies. They like to live high up and dry, so you'll find them behind pictures and electrical clocks.

Roaches breed rapidly: a single pregnant female roach can have more than 18,000 descendants in six months, so it's better to control them earlier rather than later.

How do I know I have cockroaches?

When you switch on a light in a dark room or open a drawer, roaches will quickly scatter for cover and you may not notice them. In fact, if you do see cockroaches out in daylight, you likely have a bad roach problem.

Since they like to come out when it's dark, look for other signs of roaches. One of the easiest to spot is frass, which are roach body parts and their waste. It looks a lot like ground pepper. If you see frass around a crack or crevice, you've likely found where roaches are hiding. To make sure, you might want to get some sticky traps and put them near the area overnight to see if you catch anything. A mix of big and little roaches on the trap means you're near their hiding spot.

Typical hiding spots include:



German Cockroach

How do I get rid of cockroaches?

Roaches need food, water and shelter to live, so the best thing to do is to eliminate their food, water and shelter. It's not as easy as it sounds.

Roaches can last a month without food, but only a week without water. Covering up sink drains at night will keep them from drinking from the drain trap.

A single drop of grease can feed 20 roaches for a day, so keep counters and appliances clean. Also clean and dry your dishes immediately after you finish eating.

Roaches like to be in tight spots. Seal up cracks, crevices and openings around pipes. Also, remove cardboard containers and any clutter. You might also consider putting a little boric acid or diatomaceous earth in cracks and crevices before you seal them. These are powders that have a long-lasting effect and are safe as long as you protect yourself (gloves and face masks) when you apply them.

Once you've cleaned up put out baits. Don't do any type of spraying or setting off "bug bombs"; you'll only kill the roaches that can't find any place to hide. Baits make the roaches do part of your work for you. They eat some bait and carry some back to the other roaches. Using sprays will only make the baits less appealing to the roaches, and can be dangerous to people and pets.

The Kansas City, Mo., Health Department is committed to providing the public with the best information possible. Presentations on cockroaches are available upon request. Contact Michael Swoyer at 816-513-6010.



Brown-banded Cockroach