



The Importance of Pest Management in Schools

The Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) is recommending that schools monitor and respond to pest activity quickly to ensure safe food for students. Schools play a crucial role in our education system and the community and provide many students with multiple meals each day.

As fall approaches, remember that pests often seek shelter indoors, which can lead to increased pest activity in schools. Older buildings can be more susceptible to this due to cracks, gaps, and other openings that provide easy access from the outside. Having a pest management plan can help schools prevent pest activity, act quickly if pests are detected, and keep food safe. **Now is a great time to evaluate any pest activity you observed and responded to last winter – and update your pest management plan.**

Developing a Pest Management Plan to Prevent Pests Activity in Schools:

- **Professional Pest Control:** Hire professional pest control services to conduct regular inspections, apply treatments when necessary, and monitor for any signs of pest activity. Ensure the pest management strategy is effective and compliant with local regulations.
- **Sealing Entry Points:** Close gaps, cracks, and openings around doors, windows, and walls to prevent pests from entering. Replace door sweeps as needed to ensure that doors are tightfitting.
- **Proper Waste Management:** Keep trash bins sealed, clean up spills, and avoid leaving food scraps out to reduce attractants. Ensure dumpsters are closed and the surrounding area is clean and free of clutter.
- **Cleanliness:** Maintain cleanliness in all areas, especially kitchens, food storage, and garbage areas, to minimize food sources for pests. Clean kitchen equipment and floors daily.
- **Proper Drainage:** Fix leaks and ensure good drainage to avoid attracting pests like ants or cockroaches.

RIDOH conducts bi-annual inspections of licensed school kitchens. A copy of the inspection report will be shared with the person in charge in the kitchen during the inspection and the principal's office to keep everyone informed and address any needed actions.

What to do if you detect pest activity in the school?

If pest activity is detected, the school must work closely with the principal, person in charge of maintenance/physical facilities, and the foodservice manager to develop an active pest control plan to resolve the issue. The plan should include the following steps:

- [Wash, rinse, and sanitize](#) all affected areas and equipment, including those with rodent droppings or other signs of pests. The CDC has [guidance to clean up after rodents](#).
- Implement a daily cleaning checklist with food service staff for all affected areas.
- Store all open food in sealed, protective containers.
- Ensure shelves are at least 6 inches off the wall for easier cleaning and inspection.
- Remove any unnecessary items or equipment in the kitchen or storage areas that could serve as hiding places for pests.
- Obtain a full evaluation and action plan from a professional pest control company, including treatment frequency, types of bait and traps, initial kill numbers, structural findings, contributing factors, and technician assessments.
- Increase pest control visits as needed until activity ceases.

Taking proactive pest management steps can help prevent pest activity in schools and help keep the food safe. Observing evidence in your facility of gnawed food and rodent droppings on food contact surfaces are considered gross insanitary conditions, which presents an imminent health hazard. Per section 8-404 of the RI Food Code, in the event of an imminent health hazards, the operator of the kitchen must discontinue operations to put immediate corrective actions in place. Having an effective pest management plan can help ensure that there are no disruptions in service.

For any questions related to food safety, please contact the RIDOH, Center for Food Protection at 401-222-2749.