



## NEWS RELEASE

### Department of Public Health

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## Winterize Your Home from Vector Infestations

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There is no doubt about it- winter is here! Freezing temperatures, cold air, ice and snow make the warmth inside your house cozy and inviting, especially to vectors. A vector is any animal or insect that can transmit disease to humans, such as mosquitoes, rodents, cockroaches, fleas and ticks. These vectors are well-known for spreading diseases (including West Nile Virus, Hantavirus, Plague, and Lyme disease to humans and other animals), as well as causing nuisance and unsanitary conditions.

While vectors are most active during warm summer months, vectors seek warmth from sheltered environments when the winter comes, which could mean your home. Vectors climb, claw, gnaw and slip through cracks to find entry ways into your home, causing structural damage to roofs, siding, wall voids and basements. Rats and squirrels seek warmer climates for building nests. Rodents are active at night gathering food and often gnaw on electrical wires and other materials, possibly causing home fires and property damage.

Many people only think about dealing with vectors once they are inside the home; however, the best strategy is prevention. Signs of vector infestations often go unnoticed until it is too late. Below are some simple tips for keeping your home safe and vector-free, not only in the winter, but year-round.

### Vector Control Maintenance

Removing food sources, water, and items that provide shelter for vectors is a great way to prevent them from entering your home in the first place. A big part of insect and vector control is cleanliness. When food is left out, insects or vectors can become numerous. Dinner scraps, unwashed dishes, uncovered trash, or poorly wiped tables all provide food for them. Maintaining your yard also plays a major role in keeping your home vector-free. Squirrels and rats like to gnaw at roof overhangs, shingles, gables, and sections where two roofs meet. Squirrels can even get into the attic through crevices in the chimney.

### Outdoor Vector Control Tips:

- Repair leaking pipes and faucets, which can provide moisture.
- Keep shrubs, bushes and trees trimmed back away from the house to prevent rodents from climbing the branches and reaching your roof.
- Do not feed your pet more than it can eat at one time; uneaten pet food should not be left outside after dark.



- Store large quantities of pet food in containers with tight-fitting lids.
- Always keep doors closed—some vectors are quick!
- Store lumber, firewood and similar material away from the home.
- Empty garbage cans and keep lids closed.
- Seal or repair any holes, cracks, and damaged vent screens that may allow vectors to enter. A rat only needs an opening the size of a dime to get into a wall or attic, and a mouse can squeeze through any hole that a pencil will fit through.

**Indoor Vector Control Tips:**

- Install insect screening over windows, utility vents and other areas where small pests can slip in.
- Seal all entryways, cracks, and holes in siding, doors, window screens, and areas around pipes.
- Practice good sanitation by cleaning up crumbs and spills.
- Store dry food in containers with tight-fitting lids.
- Clean under counter-top and large kitchen appliances.
- Thoroughly clean areas with signs of rodent activity to reduce the likelihood of exposure to germs and diseases.

To view tips from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention about rodents, the diseases they carry and how to prevent rodent infestations, visit [www.cdc.gov/rodents](http://www.cdc.gov/rodents).

For more information, contact the County of San Bernardino Department of Public Health Division of Environmental Health Services at 800-442-2283 or visit our website at [www.sbcounty.gov/dph/dehs](http://www.sbcounty.gov/dph/dehs).