

Pest control treatments and your health

Pesticides are chemicals that are used to kill, repel or control pests. They can include herbicides used for weed control, insecticides used for insect control and rodenticides used for mouse and rat control.

Pesticides come in the form of a liquid, powder, dust, granules or baits. All pesticide labels should indicate the type of pest it is registered to control, how it should be used and first aid instructions.

It may not be necessary to use pesticides

Consider other strategies before using pesticides, such as:

- Increased cleaning to remove food scraps and reduce the attraction for pests.
- Installing physical barriers, such as termite caps or insect screens, and sealing cavities and cracks in walls.
- Removing or physically destroying nests.
- Removing pests using traps, such as flypaper, wasp and mouse traps.

Government controls ensure pesticides can be used safely

State and federal agencies are responsible for:

- Assessing the long and short term effects of pesticides on health and the environment.
- Registering pesticides for specified uses.
- Placing restrictions on the use of particular pesticides.
- Amending the conditions of use and restrictions on registered pesticides where there is new evidence about their effects.

Check the label for registration details

The label on the pesticide container will tell you what pests it is registered to control. For more information about registered pesticides, contact the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Chemical Standards Branch or your local regional chemical standards officer.

Pest control contractors must be licensed

Any person using pesticides for commercial gain in Victoria must hold a Licence to Use Pesticides issued by the Pest Control Licensing Program of the Department of Human Services. The licence will indicate the areas of pest control for which the technician has been trained and assessed. Contractors who work exclusively on farms are required only to be licensed through DPI.

Precautions to take when pesticides are used in your home

If pesticides are used in your home:

- Before treatment put away or cover food, cooking utensils, toothbrushes, children's soft toys and other items that people or pets may put in their mouth.
- Stay away from the technicians when they are mixing and applying chemicals.
- Avoid direct contact with the chemical, especially liquids that are still wet or if an obvious layer of insecticide powder remains.
- Keep family members and pets away from the building for four to six hours, or until any wet chemical has dried.
- After a pest control treatment is finished, open doors and windows to let fresh air blow through and remove any fumes before occupying the building again. This is very important for people with allergies or asthma.
- If any pesticides have been spilled, ask the pest control company to clean them up. Do not re-enter the building until this has been done.
- If you decide to apply chemicals yourself and do your own pest control treatments, carefully follow the directions on the label of the pesticide container.

Pesticides and pregnancy

Pregnant women and their babies face very little risk if pesticides are applied properly and there is no direct exposure to the chemicals.

If a woman is pregnant and concerned about her health or her baby, she should discuss the situation with her doctor. There may be options of postponing a pest control treatment until after the baby is born, or of leaving the house overnight and staying with family or friends. However, generally these extra precautions are not required.

See over ...

Where to get help

- Department of Human Services
- Regulatory Compliance & Review Unit
- Pest Control Program Telephone: 1300 887 090
- Department of Primary Industries
- Chemical Standards Branch Telephone: (03) 9210 9379
- Your local regional chemical standards officer.

Things to remember

- It is wise to consider non-chemical pest control as a first step in controlling pests.
- Ensure that anyone you hire to provide a pest control service holds a Licence to Use Pesticides with the Department of Human Services.
- Avoid exposure to pesticide chemicals while they are wet, or if visible pesticide powder remains after a treatment.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by the Public Health Division of the Department of Human Services, Victoria. The Better Health Channel is part of the Department of Human Services, Victoria

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