

What is Essential Pest Control Service During the Coronavirus/COVID-19 Outbreak? (Short version)

Below are a set of general guidelines to help make choices about what is essential versus non-essential pest control service while complying with state social distancing and shelter-in-place orders during the coronavirus/COVID-19 outbreak. These guidelines relate to housing sites with in-house pest management staff and/or contracted services.

Advice on Pest Control Visits

Pest prevention practices that **should not** be suspended during the COVID-19 outbreak include:

- Garbage collection
- Call center operations taking calls about pest complaints; questions should be asked to determine severity for prioritization
- Control of rats in residences (any infestation level) or common areas
- Control of fire ants in and around residential areas.
- Removal of a bat from residences, or common areas
- Common-area pest inspection/treatments in high-rise hallways, maintenance areas, garbage rooms, and garbage chutes; findings of any pests in the hallways should be recorded for later proximate-apartment follow-up
- In-apartment cockroach, bed bug, mouse or fly treatments for high-level infestations in residences, or lower-level infestations if:
 - A resident has a non-COVID-19 medical issue involved, such as asthma (as a result of pandemic response measures, we currently have people spending more time in their home, exposed for longer periods to possible asthmagens and respiratory irritants)
 - A resident complains about a pest infestation and consents to treatment

Work with your pest control providers to determine what you will consider a high-level pest infestation. Consult with your local health department and university extension specialists about prioritizing additional pests of public health significance (i.e. filth flies, fleas). Treatments conducted outdoors for wasps, fire ants, mosquitoes, termites, etc. could continue with proper precautions and should be decided on a case-by-case basis.

Here are some other considerations for helping those complaining about low-level infestations during this time, with a goal of providing temporary relief while adhering to social-distancing guidelines to the greatest degree possible:

- Can you give residents information and tools like sticky monitors/traps and delay scheduling a pest control service visit?
- When practical, can you recommend that they vacuum? Or can you drop off a HEPA-rated vacuum that they can use to remove the pests themselves?

As a rule, use your discretion and seek the advice of public health officials.

How Long Could We Suspend Regular (In-Home) Service?

Aside from the above considerations about what should not be stopped, depending on COVID-19 risks, there may have to be a suspension of regular (in-apartment) activities for 1.5 to 2 months (essentially one-to two pest generations, and depending on the progress of the epidemic in the area). Pest control staff (or contractors) can use any extra time they have to continue implementing exclusion measures, checking for rodent traps and bait stations in common areas/maintenance areas/exteriors when not dealing with COVID-19-related issues. However, note that any type of delay in pest management procedures will result in dealing with potentially more severe and extensive infestations. It is critical to resume routine pest management operations as soon as possible after the risk of COVID-19 transmission has passed.

These recommendations are just meant to help guide your decision-making process. Ultimately, decisions need to be made by the building or housing authority management, with advice from your local public health department. Each management group will have to base their decisions on a variety of factors, including area COVID-19 cases, your population of vulnerable and at-risk residents, prioritizing disinfecting “common-touch” areas, and staffing levels.

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