



Cockroaches: Reporting and Response

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The presence of cockroaches in your Harvard home or workplace can be distressing. However, cockroaches don't bite and pose little to no health risk. Identifying the problem and notifying the right people is the best way to resolve cockroach issues as quickly and effectively as possible.

For questions or concerns about cockroaches, contact your building manager or EHS. We're here to help.

Reporting Cockroach Sightings

If you think you have cockroaches in your Harvard home or workplace, contact your building manager.

Your building manager will direct a pest control vendor to treat the issue as appropriate and at Harvard's cost.

Only Harvard's pest control vendors are authorized to apply insecticides on Harvard-owned property.

Understanding Cockroach Infestations

Cockroaches commonly live both indoors and outdoors. Only a few species infest dwellings, attracted by food, water, shelter, and other cockroaches of the same kind. Other types stay outdoors amongst leaf litter, helping break down decaying organic matter.



A few kinds of cockroaches live in dark, humid, and foul places like waste plumbing lines and waste rooms. They may occasionally explore our living spaces. Other enter buildings in paper bags and cardboard boxes brought in from outside the dwelling.

Health Risks of Cockroaches

Cockroaches don't harm people directly, and have little to no interest in people or other living animals. They don't bite, sting, or infest living creatures, but their presence indoors can be a nuisance and cause panic.

Cockroaches are actually very clean, grooming themselves daily to remove dirt and debris. However, those that live in sanitary waste systems or sewers can carry microbes. These cockroaches may contaminate food and surfaces in kitchens.

Exposure to some kinds of cockroach excretions and secretions can cause allergic sensitivity in some people. Symptoms vary from mild hay fever-like symptoms, such as sneezing, itching, and watery eyes, to more severe symptoms and asthma. These symptoms are more common in poorly maintained areas with chronic infestations.

Cockroach Control Measures at Harvard

EHS oversees a modern and proactive [integrated pest management \(IPM\) program](#) across Harvard campuses. This program aims to exclude pests from buildings and contain and suppress any pests that enter.

IPM program efforts focus on:

- [Sustainable engineering](#) during construction and renovations.
- Promoting behaviors that reduce opportunities that attract and foster pests.

EHS also oversees and supports Harvard-qualified pest control vendor activities on campus. EH&S guides pest abatement efforts, and responds to concerns from faculty, staff, and students. Harvard-qualified pest control vendors monitor and suppress pests using methods as humane, efficacious, environmentally acceptable, and practical as possible.



Pesticides and Pest Control Vendors

Pest control vendors place non-toxic 'blunder' glue traps in strategic locations to monitor and capture insect pests. They periodically inspect traps to assess which pests are present and plan interventions. These traps help reduce pests in the building but don't eliminate all cockroaches.

Using pesticides at Harvard is strictly regulated:

- Only Harvard-qualified, state-licensed pest control applicators are authorized to apply pesticides of any kind at Harvard.
- Faculty, staff, and students are prohibited from storing or using any pesticide on campus except as part of a research program authorized by the administration. This prohibition includes applying in your personal room or office.

Pest control vendors typically use modern gel baits that are highly effective in killing cockroaches but pose minimal risk to people, pets, and the environment. Cockroaches that eat the bait succumb within days. This is the safest and most effective method to reduce cockroach populations in infested dwellings.

Actions You Can Take to Reduce Cockroach Problems

Faculty, staff, and students should help control cockroaches by:

- Keeping your home and workplace tidy and clean and maintaining good housekeeping.
- Cleaning counters, cabinets, and floors of food crumbs.
- Eliminating clutter on floors to deny pests places to hide.
- Securing all food and candy in covered and hard-sided metal, plastic, or glass containers.
- Washing dishes free of food and food residues.
- Securing food waste and keeping trash and recycling bins securely closed.
- Emptying trash of food wrappers or waste daily.
- Removing or covering pet food when pets aren't actively feeding.



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- Repairing any breaches in waste plumbing.
- Alerting your building manager of any pest-related issue.
- Relying on pest control professionals to treat infested properties.