

SAFETY ALERT: Mouse plague in NSW

Many regions in NSW are enduring a mouse plague. Apart from damage to crops and livelihood this is causing safety risks in the workplace. This is a Work Health and Safety issue including the following hazards.

Biological hazards

There are dozens of zoonotic diseases that can be transferred from rodents to humans, including fatal diseases. These can occur through contact with droppings and urine and physical contact with the rodents. Rodents carry parasites such as insects that can act as vector. People should be wary of bites, as has been reported in some workplaces.

Much like COVID-19, extra cleaning and sanitisation should be initiated to minimise the risk of infection and extra cleaning of high-contact areas such as workspaces and eating areas. The smell of dead and dying rodents at work can also be sickening to some people. Some workplaces and towns are now on “boil water” recommendations to ensure the safety of potable water.

Hazardous chemicals

Pesticides will be used to eradicate the mice from your workplace. However, this poses an additional risk of the pesticide contamination through droppings and accidental exposure. Pesticide companies are required to provide a safety data sheet with their supply to instruct on use, safe handling, storage and what to do in exposure incidences and emergencies. However, if you cannot find it at work, the supplier internet site should have the safety data sheet. Regular cleaning of hands, working surfaces, and all cutlery and utensils prior to use is recommended. In case of exposure contact the NSW Poisons Information Line 13 11 26 or 000 (112 on mobile devices) in an emergency.

Electrical and mechanical

It is common for rodents to eat through electrical cabling or for dead rodents to block machinery parts and operation. Inspect the exterior of machinery and electrical appliances and if you see damage or suspect mice are inside the appliance (do not open appliances), disable the appliance and call for technical or electrical expertise. Most workplaces have policies that will require small appliances with electrical damage such as microwaves and kettles to be disposed of rather than repaired, whilst printers are often on lease.

Mental health

The mouse plague may also threaten farmers' livelihood, local economies and can also cause anxiety among workers who have difficulties coming in contact with the rodents. Please utilise your workplace EAP, contact your GP for a mental health plan or call Lifeline 13 11 14 if you are suffering psychological



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effects of the mouse plague. Remember that the Government has allowed for Telehealth consultations now so that you can utilise Medicare to access medical services even if they are not available locally.

Government advice and financial support

The NSW Government has a \$50million support package for farmers, businesses, and households experiencing the mouse plague. The package is available on the [NSW Government website](#) and includes webinars and advice, as well as financial support to purchase baits.

Consultation, risk management and cease work

It is the duty of your employer to provide a workplace that is safe and without risks to health. If you suspect mice are a problem, consult with your employer and your employer should consult with you. It is recommended that the risk management process is applied. If you have a reasonable concern that the work processes or workplace is unsafe leading to a serious risk to your health and safety, you may be able to cease work (processes and workplace) and request safe work be made available. Contact your union for more information.

