

House Mouse

(House Mouse – *Mus musculus*)



House mouse (adult)



Mouse droppings along a wall



Gaps stuffed with copper mesh

Identification – The house mouse is the most common pest we deal with in Northern Virginia homes. It's a small, slender animal, dusty gray-brown in color, with large ears and a long, nearly hairless tail. A full-grown adult weighs somewhere between half an ounce and an ounce.

Why they're a problem – Mice carry disease, they contaminate the food in your pantry, they chew on wiring, and they breed fast, so a couple of mice can turn into a real problem in a hurry.

What we find – Mouse activity ramps up in the fall and early winter, when they start looking for a warm way in. Because mice have to eat every day, most of the activity we find is in the kitchen, usually under the sink, behind the refrigerator and under the stove. The first thing most people notice is the droppings. They're dark, about an eighth to a quarter of an inch long, with pointed ends, and one mouse can leave fifty or more of them in a single day. Along with the droppings, you'll often see chewed food packages, shredded cardboard and dark rub marks along the walls where they travel. As for noises, they say "quiet as a mouse" for a reason. If you're hearing loud running in the attic, it's usually a squirrel or a bird, and that's a job for a wildlife company rather than pest control. Mice get in through gaps around gas pipes and A/C lines where they go through the siding, around garage door frames, through the classic hole in the corner of the garage, and through cracks in the foundation or under the front steps. A gap of just a quarter of an inch is enough for them to squeeze through.

What works – The most important step is to find the entry point and fix it from the outside. If you don't, you can end up catching mice year after year. Foaming a hole from the inside only stops them for a while, because mice will chew right through foam, drywall and even wood. Once the entry is sealed, the mice still inside need to be trapped, and the old snap trap is still the most humane way to do it. We don't recommend catch-and-release or poison indoors, because a mouse that dies inside a wall will let you know it. Dynamic uses rodent bait outside only, and always in locked, tamper-resistant stations.

What you can do – There are a few things you can handle yourself. A couple of snap traps where you're seeing droppings can tell you whether you're still dealing with mice, but for a real problem, Dynamic sets traps throughout the house and comes back weekly to check them for you. Outside, you can stuff small gaps with copper mesh or steel wool, though larger holes will need a handyman, and it helps to keep grass clippings and debris away from the foundation. When it's time to clean up, wear gloves and spray the droppings with a disinfectant like Lysol before you wipe them up. Don't sweep or vacuum them up dry. It's also normal for old droppings to keep turning up for a while after the mice are gone.

When to call Dynamic – Give us a call if you keep catching mice, if you find fresh droppings in a spot you just cleaned, or if you can't figure out how they're getting in. We'll find and repair the entry points, set traps throughout the house, and come back weekly until the catches stop. A mouse that shows up weeks after things have gone quiet is usually a nesting female, which is why we leave a few traps in place in the garage and utility room. And if you're not sure whether you're dealing with mice or something bigger, send us a photo of the droppings or the entry hole and we'll identify it for you.