

# Auckland Regional Public Health Service

Rātonga Hauora ā Iwi o Tamaki Makaurau



Working with the people of Auckland, Counties Manukau and Waitemata

## Cockroaches

### What are cockroaches?

Cockroaches are insects of the order *Blattaria*, and are one of the most common household pests. In the wild, cockroaches perform a useful role by consumption of decaying organic material. There are about 4,000 species of cockroach, of which 30 are associated with human habitation - where they are regarded as pests. The best-known pest species are:

- American cockroach (*Periplaneta americana*) - 30 millimetres long
- German cockroach (*Blattella germanica*) - 15 millimetres long
- Asian cockroach (*Blattella asahinai*) - 15 millimetres long
- Oriental cockroach (*Blatta orientalis*) - 25 millimetres long



American cockroach



German cockroach



Asian cockroach



Oriental cockroach

New Zealand varieties include both native bush cockroaches and black cockroaches. The black or brown cockroaches commonly encountered by people in their homes are usually introduced pest species (pictured above).

### Behaviour and location

Pest species of cockroaches adapt readily to a variety of environments, but prefer moist, warm conditions found within buildings. Their flattened bodies and rapid reactions enable them to quickly disperse into inaccessible locations. They are mainly nocturnal, and like to avoid light by hiding in cracks and crevices. They eat almost anything, including cardboard, and come out to feed at dusk. They like to stay together in groups, and within the home are mainly found in kitchens and bathrooms, especially behind kitchen appliances, in

laundry baskets and at the backs of cupboards. They travel along water pipes and air ducts. Tower blocks, and buildings joined to other buildings, are particularly vulnerable to re-infestation because of the ease with which cockroaches can move either through ducts in a building or between buildings.

### **Cockroaches and health effects**

Cockroaches are implicated in the transfer of disease. They are bearers of pathogens such as salmonella, *E. coli*, hepatitis E, diarrhoea, dysentery and staphylococcus. They have been linked to outbreaks of gastroenteritis, typhus and skin diseases, and are particularly associated with the transfer of bacteria on their legs from dirty areas to food and food preparation surfaces.

Contact with cockroaches can lead to a number of allergic illnesses, including dermatitis, rhinitis, bronchitis and asthma.

### **Cockroach control**

The best control method is to deny them access to the home, by mending any holes and cracks in walls, and sealing off entry points with steel wool, cement or putty.

Cockroaches need food, water and shelter to survive. Good hygiene is essential in preventing or limiting infestation. These tips should help prevent infestation:

- In the kitchen, dishes should be washed promptly, food stored in tightly sealed containers, working surfaces kept clean, and all scraps food waste cleared away.
- Rubbish should be kept in containers with tight lids, and bags properly sealed when moved outside.
- Carpets should be vacuumed regularly.
- Water spills should be mopped up and all water leaks repaired.
- Remove any clutter where cockroaches might live (e.g. in drawers, cupboards)

If used correctly, cockroach pesticide sprays, gel bait and bait traps are effective in the control of cockroaches. Follow the instructions carefully before applying them around the home. Pesticides containing hydramethylnon, fipronil, deltamethrin, cypermethrin and pyrethrin are effective at killing cockroaches. If infestation persists, then a professional pest controller should be consulted. Cockroaches are great survivors and are difficult to eliminate completely, particularly when they live in places to which there is limited access for treatment. The essence of cockroach control is to use chemical insecticides with residual properties so that the active ingredient will continue to kill hatchlings of subsequent generations.

### **Further information**

For more information on how to control cockroaches, please contact Auckland Regional Public Health Service on 09 623 4600 and ask for the duty Health Protection Officer in the Healthy Environments Team.