

# Household pesticides



Sometimes you might have pest problems that require the use of a household pesticide. Using chemicals to treat the problem may create a risk to health. Therefore, you should ensure that you take certain precautions when handling these products.

## What are pesticides?

Pesticides are substances used to manage pests and include insecticides used for insect control, herbicides used for weed control, and rodenticides used for rodent control. Pesticides may contain a mixture of chemicals but it is the 'active constituent' which targets the pest.

Although pesticides may be easily obtained from supermarkets and hardware stores, they are toxic and if used carelessly they may damage the health of the person applying the pesticide, the health of other people in the community and the environment.

## Pest identification

Pesticides are designed to target different pests and are often ineffective on other species. Therefore it is important to correctly identify the pest causing the problem in your home so the most appropriate treatment method can be selected.



If you are having trouble identifying the pest, Museum Victoria offers an identification service. They can be contacted on (03) 8341 7111. An alternative is to employ a licensed pest control operator trained in the identification and management of pests. For more information about pest control licensing, or to obtain a copy of the brochure *Are you thinking of using a pest control service? Making the right choice*, contact the Pest Control Program on 1300 887 090.

## Non-chemical pest prevention and control

The best way to control pests is to prevent them from becoming a problem. Preventative non-chemical measures are recommended before resorting to the use of pesticides. Avoiding pesticide use reduces the risk of experiencing adverse health effects.

Non-chemical pest prevention and control measures include:

- keeping the house clean and free of potential sources of food, water and shelter
- installing screens in doors and windows and sealing any gaps
- ventilating areas to prevent moisture build up and fixing any leaks in plumbing
- ensuring that litter does not accumulate around your home
- keeping tree branches and shrubbery well trimmed and clearing gutters regularly
- storing firewood away from the house and off the ground
- bathing pets regularly and ensuring that their living environment is clean and tidy
- using manual pest control methods such as fly swatters and traps.

## Health concerns

Some pests may carry diseases (for example cockroaches) or cause damage to our homes (for example termites) while others may just be irritating or unpleasant (for example harmless spiders). If the non-chemical measures fail to control the pest problem the use of a pesticide may be necessary.

## Applying a pesticide safely

Pesticides can take the form of a solid, liquid or powder. The form will influence the way in which the pesticide can enter the body through swallowing, inhaling, or contact with the skin or eyes. The individual applying the pesticide is at the greatest risk of exposure and should take precautions when using pesticide. These include:

- selecting the right type of pesticide for the pest problem
- reading the label thoroughly before application and following all label directions including the safety information
- using the appropriate personal protective equipment as specified on the label. This may include gloves, boots, overalls, eye protection, face shield or a respirator.
- ensuring all people and pets leave the area being treated
- ensuring food, clothes, toys, toothbrushes, bedding, towels, vegetable gardens, barbeques, pet bowls, fish ponds, clotheslines and cooking utensils are covered or removed from the area to be treated
- closing doors and windows before applying pesticide outdoors
- not spraying outdoors on windy or rainy days as this may cause harm to other people or the environment
- ensuring adequate ventilation if applying a pesticide in a confined space
- placing baits only where they cannot be accessed by children, pets or wildlife
- not eating, drinking or smoking while working with pesticides
- keeping emergency numbers, such as that for the poisons information centre (13 11 26) nearby
- if the pesticide has been applied indoors, ensure that benchtops and kitchen utensils are thoroughly cleaned prior to food preparation
- washing hands immediately after using pesticides.

## Safe disposal and storage of pesticides

Dispose of empty pesticide containers according to the directions on the label. When purchasing pesticides it is important to obtain only the amount required for immediate use. Never dispose of unused pesticide down the drain or on the ground. If a spill occurs it should be cleaned up promptly by covering it with sand or kitty litter before sweeping it up and storing it in a sealed, rigid container for appropriate disposal. For more information regarding disposal of unused pesticides contact your local council or the Environment Protection Authority on (03) 9695 2722.

If necessary, pesticides should be stored according to the instructions on the label. The containers should be closed tightly and placed out of reach of children and pets. They should be stored away from food and medical supplies, in a well-ventilated area and out of direct sunlight. Flammable liquids should be stored away from ignition sources. Pesticides should not be transferred to different containers unless the original container is damaged. The new container should be clearly labelled. Never reuse empty pesticide containers.



# Understanding a pesticide label

All pesticide labels contain valuable information. It is important to read and understand this information particularly instructions relating to application and safety. Following the instructions on the label will ensure that the treatment is effective against your pest problem and minimise the risk of adverse health effects resulting from exposure.

Here is an example of a pesticide label:

**CAUTION**

KEEP OUT OF REACH OF CHILDREN  
READ SAFETY DIRECTIONS BEFORE  
OPENING OR USING

**BUG BEGONE**

ACTIVE CONSTITUENT  
500 g/kg chlorpyrifos

For the control of domestic insect pests as  
specified in the directions for use table

400 g NET

Pests R Us, PO Box 1, VIC 3000  
Emergency Contact No: 1800 etc

**How to use:** Shake well before each use. One or two short sprays in the direction of the flying pest should be adequate. Do not spray as a continuous stream.

**NOT TO BE USED FOR ANY PURPOSE, OR IN A MANNER, CONTRARY TO THIS LABEL UNLESS AUTHORISED.**

Room may be entered immediately following treatment. No withholding period necessary.

Keep in a cool place out of the sun. DO NOT puncture or incinerate can, even when empty. Recycle empty cans if a facility is available or place used can in household rubbish.

Poisonous if swallowed. May irritate the eyes and skin. Avoid contact with the eyes and skin. DO NOT inhale spray mist. Wash hands following use.

**First aid:** If poisoning occurs, contact a doctor or Poisons Information Centre Australia 13 11 26. Do not induce vomiting.

Batch: 1234      DOM:220806  
APVMA approval number: 12345/0605

The **signal heading** indicates the level of toxicity or how harmful the product may be. Those marked with 'Dangerous Poison' are the most toxic, while 'Poison' or 'Caution' indicate less toxic products

The **prohibition** and restriction statement provides general instructions to minimise the risk of exposure

The **product name** is important for administering first aid in the event of an emergency

The list of **ingredients** include the active ingredient of the product, solvents and other ingredients which are important for administering First Aid

The **intended use** statement lists the range of pests the product is registered to control

Only purchase enough pesticide for your intended use by considering the **amount** in the container

For queries about the product or to obtain an MSDS (Material Safety Data Sheet) contact the **manufacturer** or distributor

In the case of an **emergency** call this number

Always follow the **directions** on how to use the product and note the application rate

The pesticide is "**not to be used**" contrary to the labelled instructions

The **re-entry** period refers to the length of time an area should be vacated for following application. The **withholding** period refers to the period between application and harvesting of produce.

The label instructions specify appropriate **storage** and **disposal** methods for the product

The **safety direction** describes the potential health effects which may result from exposure and methods to protect yourself

The **first aid** instructions specify who to contact if poisoning occurs and any actions to take

The **batch number** allows tracking of product use in case of defective batches

The **date of manufacture** or expiry date are important in ensuring the product is purchased and used within its shelf life and therefore still effective

The **APVMA approval number** indicates that the product is registered with the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority, which ensures that the product is safe and effective when used in accordance with the label directions.

## Further information

Department of Health

Pest Control Program

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If you would like to receive this publication in an accessible format, please phone 1300 887 090 using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email [pestcontrol@dhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:pestcontrol@dhs.vic.gov.au)

This document is also available in pdf format on the internet at [www.health.vic.gov.au/pestcontrol](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/pestcontrol)

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