

## TROPICAL RAT AND NORTHERN FOWL MITES FACT SHEET

### What are mites?

Mites are tiny spider-like bugs closely related to ticks. The typical mite is the size of the period at the end of this sentence. There are over 45,000 species of mites. Depending on the kind of mite, they feed on many things including plants and animals. People may be familiar with *Scabies* mites that can infest humans, dogs and livestock. Less well-known mites associated with humans in California are the tropical rat mite (*Ornithonyssus bacoti*) and northern fowl mite (*Ornithonyssus sylvarium*), which are the subject of this fact sheet.

Tropical rat and northern fowl mites live in the nest material of rodents or birds, feed on the blood of the animal, and then return to the nest material when they are done feeding. If the rodent or bird abandons its nest or dies, the mites leave the nest to search for another animal to feed on. Humans can become a target for the mite's next blood-meal if the rodent or bird nests are found in housing structures. In homes, mites may be found around heat sources like hot water pipes and stoves.

### Are tropical rat and northern fowl mites dangerous to humans?

Tropical rat and northern fowl mites do not burrow under the skin and do not transmit disease to humans. However, these mite bites can cause skin irritation and itching for up to a week. The pimple-sized bite marks may take up to three weeks to disappear. The reaction to mite bites can be treated with antihistamines or hydrocortisone cream. People who experience severe reactions to mite bites should see their doctor.

### How can I stop an infestation of tropical rat and northern fowl mites?

The most effective means of stopping infestation of these mites is to get rid of the rodent or bird nests where the mites are living.

Vacuuming carpets and furniture will provide a temporary solution when mites have invaded the household. Immediately after vacuuming, dispose of the vacuum bag or empty the canister so that the mites do not reinvade the house again.

To remove rodents from homes:

- Place spring-loaded “snap” traps along baseboards and in areas where rodents are entering the home.
- Examine traps regularly and remove trapped rodents promptly.
- Dispose of traps or thoroughly disinfect them prior to reuse.
- Wearing disposable gloves, place rodent nests, carcasses and traps in a plastic bag. Tie off the bag, place inside a second bag and tie the second bag as well. Dispose of bags with other garbage.

To remove birds nesting in homes:

- Check for areas where birds roost or nest in the attic, garage, or on the outside of the house and remove any bird nests that you find while wearing gloves and disposing of them as described above for rodents. Nests with eggs of european starlings, common house sparrows and pigeons can be removed; for all other species the nest must be free of eggs or young in order to remove it ([http://library.fws.gov/Bird\\_Publications/prob.html](http://library.fws.gov/Bird_Publications/prob.html)).

### **How can I prevent infestations of these mites?**

The best way to prevent infestations of these mites is to keep rodents and birds from nesting in or around your home. Check inside and outside your home regularly for signs of rodents; look for live or dead mice, droppings, urine stains, nests, and gnawing marks. Seal holes larger than 1/4 inch in diameter with cement, wire screening, hardware cloth, or steel wool. Trim trees and bushes away from the roof of the house.

To prevent birds from nesting or returning, block access to roosting or nesting areas with wire screening or netting or use bird repellent needle strips to keep birds from roosting in these areas.

If the infestation persists, consult a licensed pest-control operator for a detailed inspection and chemical mite removal options.