

## What steps can I take to avoid having to use pesticides in my home and garden in the first place?

Indoors, the first line of defense is to remove sources of food, water and shelter that pests need. Begin by fixing leaky plumbing and look for other sources of water, such as trays under house plants. Make sure food and food scraps are tightly sealed and garbage is regularly removed from the home; don't leave pet food and water out overnight. Close off holes and hiding places where pests could make their home, such as cracks and crevices around baseboards.

Outdoors, begin by removing places where pests are likely to breed. Ensure there is no stagnant water on your property as this is a prime breeding area for mosquitoes. Also remove all material likely to attract pests, such as piles of garden or wood waste.

## How should pesticides be handled and disposed of for the greatest safety?

As far as possible, buy only what you need. This eliminates the risk of having unused pesticides lying around.



Use only the amount of pesticide and the strength specified on the label. Do **not** use up pesticides by adding more to the solution, or applying more frequently than the label says. Don't think that a solution twice as strong will work twice as well. It won't, and it could pose a risk to your health.

**Never** dispose of leftover pesticides down the sink, into the toilet, down a sewer or into a storm drain.

Check with the Capital Regional District to find out how best to dispose of such hazardous materials.

## We are all responsible for pesticide safety.

The federal Pest Management Regulatory Agency of Health Canada requires a battery of tests for each pest control product before the product can be registered for specific uses.

The provincial government regulates the commercial application of pesticides through permits and pest management plans. It requires those who apply pesticides professionally to have special training. For the more hazardous products sold for domestic pest control, the provincial government requires that the retailer review the pesticide use with anyone who is buying it.

The homeowner has an important role to play in pesticide safety by following all label instructions and taking all precautions to prevent acute accidental poisonings.

## Want more information?

For more information on pesticide safety, visit the Vancouver Island Health Authority website at [www.viha.ca/mho](http://www.viha.ca/mho).

There, you'll find links to a variety of helpful resources for the homeowner and gardener.

The Capital Regional District also has free useful brochures on how to avoid pesticide use in your garden.



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# PESTICIDE USE AND HUMAN HEALTH

**The Vancouver Island Health Authority is often asked about the safety of pesticides used in homes, gardens, or public places. This brochure will answer some of the most commonly asked questions about pesticide use and human health, based on the most reliable and up-to-date scientific research.**



## What is a pesticide?

The broad definition of a pesticide is any substance (or mixture of substances) used for preventing, destroying, repelling or controlling any pest. Pests can include weeds, insects, fungi, and some animals, such as rodents.



## Why are pesticides used?

When other control measures fail, pesticides used sensibly can be a valuable tool in protecting human health. In some parts of the world, preventing the spread of malaria by using pesticides to control mosquitoes saves millions of lives. Here in North America, mosquito control programs, which may use pesticides to kill either mosquito larvae or adults, are being used to prevent the spread of the West Nile virus, which can cause serious illness and even death. Rodent control programs can also greatly reduce the spread of other potentially fatal diseases.

Pesticides can also be valuable in the production of food crops. Their use allows cheaper production of fruits and vegetables, meaning these health-promoting foods are more affordable than would otherwise be the case.

## How safe are pesticides?

The safety of pesticides depends greatly on the type of pesticide used, and how people apply, store, and dispose of them. There is no scientific evidence of harm to human health from the occasional use of government approved pesticides that have been correctly and safely applied.



## What is the best approach to pesticide use for home and garden?

Current research suggests that the best approach to controlling pests in your home or garden is a step-by-step one. The first, and best, move you can take is to do everything possible to prevent infestations of pests in the first place.

If despite these efforts, you end up with pests on your property, the next steps should be to determine exactly what the pest is and try to find out why it is present. Then evaluate the seriousness of the situation and, if necessary, determine the best plan to eliminate or control the pest. You should first look at non-chemical means of pest control. The use of chemical pesticides should most often be considered only if all these other efforts fail.

## What is the greatest risk to human health from pesticides?

By far the greatest harm to people from pesticides happens when someone is poisoned by eating or drinking a single large dose of pesticide by mistake.



Small children are the most common victims of this sort of pesticide poisoning, which can occasionally prove fatal. However, adults can also fall victim if, for instance, pesticides are moved from their original containers into other bottles that are not clearly and properly labelled.



## How can I protect my family from this type of pesticide poisoning?

**Never** transfer pesticides to other containers, especially ones that are labelled as being food items, such as old soft drink bottles. Pesticides **must** be kept in their original containers, with the labels on them intact. The labels contain not only instructions for proper use, but also information about what to do in the case of an unwanted exposure.

Ensure that all pesticides are stored in such a way that they are out of reach of children and pets. The best place to keep pesticides is a locked cabinet in a well-ventilated utility shed or garden shed.

## What other health risks may pesticides pose to humans?

Other cases of human health problems arising from pesticide exposure most often are found in those who are exposed to large amounts of pesticides over a long period of time. These may include farmers, farm workers and pest control staff. The problems are worse for those who do not take proper precautions, such as wearing protective clothing, while applying the chemicals. The problem can also spread to the workers' families if they don't clean up properly before going home, and so track the chemicals into their houses.



## What are the best ways to avoid risks while applying pesticides?

Before applying a pesticide, read the label carefully and in detail, and ensure you follow **all** the instructions provided by the manufacturer.

The product will have had an extensive evaluation for risks to health, and the label will include a summary of all recommendations for safe use.



Wear protective clothing when applying pesticides. Some labels will specify the level of protection needed.

If the label does not do so, it is always considered safest to wear gloves, long-sleeved shirts, long pants and closed-toe shoes.

Never smoke or eat while mixing or applying pesticides. Never use the same measuring cups or spoons for measuring pesticides that you use in the kitchen.

Always wash your hands immediately after finishing applying any pesticide. Also wash any other parts of your body that has come into contact with the pesticide, and remove or rinse your shoes before entering your house to avoid tracking pesticides inside.

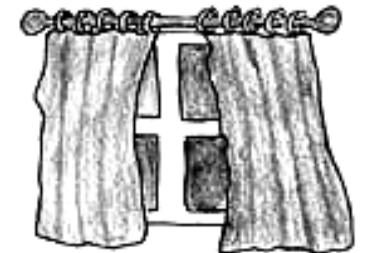


## Are some pesticides safer to use than others?

Yes, and it is important to know how they are different. Biological pesticides, such as those used to control certain insects when they are in an immature life-stage (larvae), are considered a very low risk to human health. Other types may be toxic to humans if applied improperly. Therefore, it is important to read the handling instructions and carefully follow all safety precautions on the label.

## What precautions should be taken when using pesticides indoors?

In towns and cities, the indoor environment is the place where the greatest potential for unwanted pesticide exposures exists, particularly for children. Using chemical pesticides indoors requires special care, because indoor spaces are less likely to be well-ventilated which is necessary to allow the pesticide to disperse properly.



If you must use pesticides indoors, provide adequate ventilation. If the label directions allow, keep windows open and/or fans running after the pesticide is applied.

If the directions say the pesticide will work only in a closed room, ensure that no humans or pets remain in the room after pesticide application.

Ensure that food is secure and food contact surfaces are covered and then are washed before preparing food.

Keep everyone out of the room for at least the length of time specified on the label.

**Never use pesticides designed for outdoor use, in an indoor setting.**