

# Pests in the School Environment

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With large foodservice operations, constant foot traffic and an abundant supply of food, water and shelter, schools provide an ideal environment for pests. It's important for school administrators to understand that pests can be more than just irritating and disruptive to learning; they can also be a threat to the safety and health of students.



Pests can compromise a healthy learning environment for several reasons. First and foremost, pests can carry disease-causing organisms like bacteria, viruses and parasites. In fact, flies alone are capable of carrying billions of germs. Flies and other bacteria carrying pests, such as cockroaches and rodents, are particularly a concern in school cafeterias and lunchrooms. When present in these areas, they are capable of spreading life threatening food-borne illnesses such as Salmonella and E. coli to students and staff alike.

In addition to spreading disease, pests such as wasps can elicit painful stings and be a risk to students and staff allergic to stings. Another common health concern among school-aged children is asthma, which can be aggravated by allergens present in cockroach feces, cast skins and dead bodies, even after the cockroach infestation has been eliminated.



So what can schools do to help maintain a pest-free learning environment? The answer is Integrated Pest Management (IPM). Recommended by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), IPM is a low impact, environmentally responsible approach to pest management. IPM focuses on preventing pest problems before they occur, using non-chemical methods such as stringent sanitation and facility maintenance, which in turn helps schools reduce pesticide risks and exposure to students.

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There are several key components of IPM that should be included in any successful program. Work with a trained and licensed pest management provider to incorporate the following tips into your IPM program:

- Get your staff on board with your pest management efforts. Educate them on signs of pest activity and common pest "hot spots." Many pest management providers – and even some government regulatory agencies – offer free training.
- Keep vegetation at least one foot away from school buildings. Bushes and tree limbs that brush up against buildings can give crawling pests a bridge to make their way inside.
- Deny entry to pests by sealing cracks and crevices in walls, floors and pavement with weather resistant sealant.
- Empty and clean lockers and desks at least twice yearly. Snacks left behind provide the perfect meal for pests and these areas offer a dark, warm area where pests can thrive without disturbance.
- In the cafeteria, clean dishes, utensils, surfaces and floors thoroughly each day to remove any food debris that may attract a hungry pest.
- Regularly clean garbage cans and dispose of garbage daily to eliminate odors and food sources that might attract pests.
- Keep dumpster corrals clean and free of debris, and move dumpster as far away from the building as possible. Work with your waste management professional to regularly clean and rotate your dumpster to disrupt any pests in residence.

Students spend the majority of their day at school, so it's important to provide a safe and healthy learning environment. Work closely with your pest management professional to implement an IPM program to eliminate pest problems before they occur.

Dr. Zia Siddiqi is Director of Quality Systems for Orkin. A board certified entomologist with more than 30 years in the industry, Dr. Siddiqi is an acknowledged leader in the field of pest management. For more information, e-mail [zsiddiqi@orkin.com](mailto:zsiddiqi@orkin.com) or visit [www.orkincommercial.com](http://www.orkincommercial.com).

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