

Small Ants

Most small ants in Oregon are harmless. They do not transmit human disease and are thus called nuisance ants. Pavement Ants and Odorous House Ants are the two most common types of ants found in Oregon schools.

Nuisance ants may nest outdoors under objects, in soil, or within wall voids of structures. Pavement ants nest in soil under concrete walkways or foundations. Ants sometimes enter buildings in search of food or water, or during periods of heavy rain. Some sugar-feeding ants may move indoors in winter when their preferred food source (honeydew from aphids) is gone. Ants may also be more noticeable in spring or summer as colonies are dividing and establishing new nests.

Pavement Ant

The pavement ant gets its name from commonly locating its nest in or under cracks in pavement. It also nests under stones and at the edges of pavement. In winter it will nest in buildings in crevices adjacent to a heat source. Pavement ants tend aphids for their honeydew, and feed on seeds and insect remains. Indoors they may feed on sweets and greasy food.

Odorous House Ant

The odorous house ant gets its name from the pungent, rotten-coconut-like odor given off when it is crushed. It nests in a wide variety of places both outdoors and indoors. Odorous house ants tend aphids (as well as scale insects and mealybugs) for their honeydew, which they prefer, but they also feed on other insects. Indoors they may feed on sweets, protein foods, and greasy food. When odorous house ants are disturbed or threatened, they can break off from the main colony and form satellite colonies. This is called "budding". When odorous house ants disperse and form new colonies and nests in this way, one colony of ants can actually have multiple satellite colonies and multiple queens. Disturbances, such as spraying a pesticide on a group of odorous house ants, actually increases the number of ants because of budding.

When Nuisance Ants Come Inside

Total eradication of nuisance ants indoors is extremely difficult. The district's first response to any trail of ants is to clean surfaces with soapy water or a disinfectant. Fortunately, most ants will leave on their own if denied access to food and water. Additional control measures are warranted if ants are entering a school in large enough numbers to cause a disruption in the learning environment. The district will use mechanical methods (such as crack sealing) first, and may use low-impact pesticide baits only as a last resort.

If nuisance ants become a disruption at a school, staff should take the following steps:

- Ask the custodian to vacuum any food crumbs, clean up any garbage or spills, and to use soap and water to clean areas where ant trails are seen (unless the areas are small and staff can clean them quickly). This can prevent other ants from following the pheromone trails that ants leave to mark the way to food.
- Make sure that any other food or water sources are removed, placed in tightly sealed containers, cleaned, or repaired. Food and water sources can include human or pet food, recycling bins, leaking faucets, clogged drains, damp wood, etc. For repairs, ask your custodian to fill out a work request on line.
- If staff finds a place where an ant trail enters the room or building, they should mark it for later sealing by the custodian or **the maintenance/construction department**. A temporary “seal” can be made with duct tape, if desired.

PROTOCOL FOR TREATING NUISANCE ANTS

A. When staff observe a small number of ants (e.g. under 10 ants) they must:

- 1st) Spend two minutes trying to find out where the ants are coming from
- 2nd) Kill the ants with a paper towel or similar
- 3rd) Remove any food or liquid the ants were eating
- 4th) Wipe down the area with soapy water or disinfectant to remove pheromone trails
- 5th) Jot down any action(s) they take in the Pest Log

B. If the ants come back or there are more than a small number (e.g. under 10 ants):

- 1st) Spend two minutes trying to find out where the ants are coming from
- 2nd) Jot down any action(s) they take in the Pest Log
- 3rd) Ask the custodian to come with vacuum and sealant as soon as he/she is able

C. The custodian will:

- 1st) Spend two minutes trying to find out where the ants are coming from
- 2nd) Vacuum up the ants and any food debris nearby (vacuum up a tablespoon of corn starch to kill most of the ants in the vacuum bag, then put the vacuum bag inside plastic garbage bag, seal it, and dispose of it properly)
- 3rd) Seal up the crack or hole where the ants were coming from **(do what can be done in less than 15 minutes)**
- 4th) Wipe down the area with soapy water or disinfectant to remove pheromone trails
- 5th) Jot down the above in the Pest Log

When to use baits:

To avoid a proliferation of small ants and/or unnecessary applications of pesticides, the routine use of ant baits is not permitted without first:

- 1) Educating staff on sanitation, monitoring, and exclusion as the primary means to control the ants.
- 2) Establishing an acceptable pest population density (e.g. 10 ants).
- 3) Improving sanitation (e.g. cleaning up crumbs and other food sources) and structural remediation (sealing up cracks or holes where the ants are coming from).
- 4) Following A, B, and C above.

If the use of a low-impact pesticide baits are deemed necessary, they will be placed in childproof containers, and used only in areas that are out of sight and reach of children/students. Small amounts of low-impact pesticide gels or pastes may also be placed in cracks and crevices or low-impact pesticide dusts may be sprayed into wall voids.

Staff must be informed that sanitation is important to ensure the effectiveness of any baits that are used. Ants are less likely to take a bait if there are more attractive food and water sources nearby.

ADDITIONAL EXCLUSION MEASURES

In addition to sealing up cracks and holes where the ants are coming from, **custodial and/or maintenance/construction staff** should routinely seal up as many cracks and holes as time allows, especially those around:

- Baseboards
- Cupboards
- Electrical outlets
- Pipes
- Sinks
- Toilets

Outdoors, pipe and electrical chases should be sealed off.

Grounds staff should prune away any tree limbs or bushes (leaving about 24" of space) that are touching the building.