



Pests—mice and ants, for example—can easily access desk food and chew through bags or wrappers. Proper food storage in classrooms is critical for pest prevention.



Food-based arts and crafts projects also need to be stored in containers with secure lids.

Food in the classroom... It can bring joy to children's faces, or elicit groans from teachers and custodians alike.

The United States is currently undergoing a food revolution in its schools. New federal laws seek to limit sugar, salt, and fat content in school meals and snacks, while increasing the amount of whole grains, vegetables, and fruits. Current and pending laws govern federally-funded breakfast, lunch, and snack programs, but do not apply to classroom treats brought in by students, parents, or teachers. As we all know, treats and snacks are common in many classrooms and are likely here to stay.

CLASSROOM FOOD AND PESTS...

While regulations and concerns over childhood nutrition are an evolving topic, there is one aspect about classroom food that has not changed: if you provide it, the pests will come. Classrooms with microwaves and refrigerators are especially prone to food debris and pest occurrence. In addition to a food source, these appliances provide a heat source and shelter for pests.

Primary pests like ants, flies, cockroaches, and mice are not picky; they'll be drawn to half-chewed Halloween candy covered in dust, the long-forgotten crumbs under the microwave, a few bits of birthday cake ground into the rug, or juice residue left on desks and furniture by sticky-sweet faces and fingers. It takes very little food for pests to thrive and reproduce in the hidden spaces of a classroom. Some common pests, such as certain flies, can carry disease organisms and spread food-borne illnesses, including

WHAT IS INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT (IPM)?

IPM is a form of pest management that focuses on prevention by reducing available food, water, and shelter that pests need. IPM involves good sanitation, exclusion, changes in human habits/cultural practices, and the judicious use of least-toxic chemical controls. Good IPM practices can result in long-term prevention of pests AND a reduction in pesticide use. IPM benefits human health, the environment, and non-target/beneficial organisms.

TIPS FOR MANAGING FOOD IN THE CLASSROOM

Careful food management in the classroom will help keep pest issues to a minimum.

TEACHERS & STUDENTS

1. Manage free-range eating in the classroom by designating an easy-to-clean “snack area”. If the area is small, consider having students rotate play time and snack time. The more consolidated food crumbs and residues are, the more thoroughly custodial staff can clean on a tight schedule.
2. Encourage students to help clean up and tell you about spills immediately.
3. Avoid foods that are difficult to clean up after (treats with frosting, muffins, etc.). Request that parents bring in snacks like granola bars, carrot sticks, grapes, or individually-packaged treats that generate fewer crumbs. Send leftovers home with students.
4. Store your desk and cupboard foods in hard containers with snap-tight or screw-top lids. Boxes and plastic or foil bags are no barrier to a hungry mouse or insect.
5. Consider removing the refrigerator or microwave from your classroom. Annual energy savings will benefit your district, and you’ll be eliminating one more home to a pest.
6. Move stored materials off the floor (e.g., onto shelves, or tables along the wall, etc.). This opens up access to the wall base

(where food debris and pests accumulate) so that custodial staff can clean more thoroughly.

7. Clean up spills or notify custodians promptly. Make sure that any trash or recycling containing food debris is removed from the classroom every night.

CUSTODIANS

1. Share this newsletter with teachers and administrators at your school. Remind staff that pests are after three things: food, water, shelter. Everyone has a role in managing these to prevent pests.
2. At least once per month, vacuum along the wall base and behind freestanding furniture. Most pests follow walls, and eat debris that accumulates there.
3. Empty classroom garbage as often as district policy allows. During the fall and winter holidays, this may require daily garbage service due to the surplus in classroom food.
4. For pest issues that cannot be immediately addressed with sanitation, report them to your district IPM Coordinator or pest manager.

salmonella¹. Urine and dander from the common house mouse are known allergens and triggers of asthma². Secondary pests—such as spiders, and other predatory or scavenging organisms—may also invade a classroom.

UNWANTED HOLIDAY GUESTS...

In addition to regular classroom meals, snacks, and birthday parties, classroom food during the fall and winter holidays can pose challenges to pest prevention. From October through December, it can be especially difficult for teachers to limit food in the classroom, or for custodial staff to keep up with classroom sanitation needs resulting from increased food during this time. Integrated pest management requires that all staff have a role in pest prevention and work together to achieve results. When it comes to managing classroom food, teachers and students may play the most important role of all.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- ¹Graczyk, T. K., R. Knight, R. H. Gilman, M. R. Cranfield. 2001. *The role of non-biting flies in the epidemiology of human infectious diseases. Microbes and Infection* 3(3): 231-235.
- ²Phipatanakul, W. 2002. *Rodent Allergens. Current Allergy and Asthma Reports* 2: 412-416.
- *The National Pesticide Information Center (NPIC) provides objective, science-based information about pesticides and related topics to enable people to make informed decisions. To contact NPIC, call 1-800-858-7378 or visit <http://npic.orst.edu>.*



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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