



How “safe” are pesticides?

Anne lives in an apartment with her cat, Fluffy, and she’s concerned because her apartment is going to be sprayed for [bed bugs](#). Yesterday there was a notice on her door from the pest control company saying they would be spraying her apartment tomorrow! She is worried that she and Fluffy could get sick.

[Click here](#) to find out what Anne learned when she called [NPIC](#).



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7:30 am to 3:30 pm Pacific Time (PT), Monday - Friday

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The NPIC specialist first asked Anne some questions about the application, such as what [pesticide product](#) they would be using and where. Anne could not answer those questions because the notice did not give any more information. The NPIC specialist explained that these details would be necessary to provide specific information about her and Fluffy’s [risk](#).

Anne learned how to find out what product would be used by asking her landlord or the pest control company for the [EPA registration number](#) or active ingredient names of the product(s). The NPIC specialist told her that pesticide products are registered with the EPA, and they have an EPA registration number that is listed on each product [label](#).¹

Anne’s biggest concern was whether the product was going to be safe for Fluffy and herself. The NPIC specialist began to explain that risk depends on both toxicity and exposure. The toxicity of a product, or how poisonous it can be, can range from very low to very high. The level of toxicity is dependent on the active ingredients in the product. There are over 1,000 active ingredients registered for use, and they can be [formulated](#) in many different ways (i.e. dust, liquid, gel, etc.). That’s why it’s important to identify the exact product(s) before determining the level of risk. Generalizations cannot be made.

Risk also depends on exposure, or how the person or animal comes into contact with the product. Contact can occur by eating it, getting it on the skin, or breathing it in. The way in which the pesticide is applied affects how a person comes into contact with it. The NPIC specialist explained to Anne that it would be important to determine where and how the pesticide applicator would apply the product. They discussed some [general ways to minimize exposure](#), but Anne would be able to get more specific information once she knew more about the application. Anne also found out some general ideas for [minimizing exposure to her pet](#).

Anne was able to get the EPA registration number. When she called back, the NPIC specialist was able to look up the product in a database. The specialist used the database and other resources to provide specific information about the toxicity and ways to minimize their exposure. Armed with this information, Anne felt better knowing that she could reduce her and Fluffy’s risk.

¹ Some pesticide products do not have an EPA registration number because they contain only ingredients that are considered [minimum risk](#). For these products, callers should get the ingredients in the product to give to NPIC specialists.

