

Bristol's rat population could spiral "out of control" this year, according to a pest controller.

Pest.co.uk, based in Bristol, estimates the city had 950,000 rats in 2020 – a 25 per cent rise on 760,000 the year before, based on data from call-outs.

The firm warns rodents are migrating from commercial to residential areas during lockdown, prompting "increasing reports from worried residents" of sightings in Bristol.

It comes after Brislington East councillor Tony Carey voiced fears last month that the Broomhill council estate could be infested by a "honking great family" of rats.

Two women on the estate said their upstairs flats – in buildings metres apart – were infiltrated by rodents in recent months.

Pest.co.uk's Jenny Rathbone said: "Reports of rats being seen in open public areas during lockdown are common, with the Bristol City Council pest control department being sent an increasing number of reports of rats in inner-city residential areas as rats migrate in the search for food and shelter.

"Lockdown is presenting a serious challenge for pest controllers in Bristol, none more so than where financial cuts and social distancing is hampering the local authority department in their ability to tackle rat populations.

"This is not only a funding issue – the population of rats is growing, now to a staggering 945,924, and the ability to control them with traditional means is decreasing as 74 per cent of UK rats have been shown to carry immunity to popular poisons."

To get news straight to your inbox, [click here](#).

Ms Rathbone added the first lockdown, in March last year, allowed rats to get a "foothold" in Bristol and they have since "bred well". She fears the population could get "out of control".

The council pointed out it tabled a "no new cuts" budget last week.

Pest.co.uk has given the following advice to anyone living in urban areas of Bristol:

Block holes – fill any gaps in brickwork, shed doors and any holes on external walls of your home including cellars and attics

Clear cupboards – empty disused cupboards of bags, clothes and rags, and keep them clean

Secure all food sources – make sure food is not left out, tidy away any open food sources and keep worktops and floors clean of crumbs

Prepare traps – by leaving out rat traps you can pre-empt any future infestation, but it is better to bait with rat poison than leaving food scraps out

Ms Rathbone said: “2021 could be interesting and the longer the lockdown continues, the higher the risk that rats get a real foothold that will be hard to control come summer.”

A council spokesperson said: “We respond to reports of pest issues made throughout the city as quickly as possible and while there is no obligation to use the council service, we continue to ensure help and resources are available to the city’s most vulnerable and high risk groups where it is needed.