



Bed Bug Awareness: Tips for Renters

As a renter, you have an important role in preventing and controlling bed bugs. While the presence of bed bugs is not necessarily related to personal hygiene or housekeeping standards, excellent housekeeping will help control the problem by identifying bed bugs, minimizing an infestation, and limiting its spread. Here's what you can do to help.

Practice Good Housekeeping

- Remove clutter. Bed bugs like dark, concealed places, such as in and around piles of clothing, shoes, stuffed animals, laundry, especially under the bed and in closets. Reducing clutter also makes it easier to carry out thorough housekeeping. If possible, use sealable plastic bins to store clothing, toys, and other items. Some apartment managers will provide containers.
- Keep the unit clean. Vacuum and dust regularly, particularly in the bedroom, being especially thorough around and under the bed, drapes, and upholstered furniture. Use a brush attachment to vacuum furniture legs, headboard, and in and around the nightstand. While cleaning, look for signs of bed bugs, and report these immediately.
- Avoid using secondhand or rental furnishings, especially beds and mattresses. Used items are often infested with bed bugs — not just furniture, but rugs and carpets, blankets and quilts, lamps, pictures, mirrors, baskets, etc. If you must use rented or secondhand items, inspect them carefully, and never accept any item that shows signs of bed bugs, no matter how old or “dead” the infestation may seem. Never take discarded items from the curbside.
- Cover mattresses and box springs with zippered, vinyl coverings. These are relatively inexpensive, and can prevent bed bugs from getting inside the mattress, their favorite nesting spot. The covers will also prevent any bugs inside from getting out; they will eventually die inside the sealed cover (though this may take many months. Thicker covers will last longer.
- Arrange furniture to minimize bed bug hiding places. If possible, keep beds and upholstered furniture several inches away from the walls. Bed bugs can jump as far as three inches.
- Check for hitch-hiking bedbugs. If you stay in a hotel, motel, resort, or another home, inspect your clothing, luggage, shoes, and belongings for signs of bed bugs *before* you enter your own apartment. Use recommended cleaning techniques to remove bugs and eggs. Check backpacks, shoes, and clothing after visits to friends or family, theaters, or after use of public transportation. After guests visit your home, inspect beds, bedding, and upholstered furniture.
- Report any signs of bed bugs immediately. Do not wait. Even a few bugs can rapidly multiply to create a major infestation that can spread from unit to unit.
- Report any maintenance needs immediately. Bed bugs like cracks, crevices, holes, and other openings. Request that all openings be sealed to prevent the movement of bed bugs from room to room.

If Your Unit Must Be Treated

If your unit (or a neighbor's unit) is infested with bed bugs, a pest management professional may be called in to apply pesticides. The treatment is more likely to be effective if your unit is properly prepared. Here's what to do:

- Remove all bedding (bed skirts too), drapes, curtains, and small rugs; bag these for transport to the laundry or dry cleaner.
- Check mattresses carefully; those with minimal infestation may be cleaned, then encased in vinyl covers and returned to service. Heavily infested mattresses are not salvageable; seal these in plastic and dispose of them properly. Mark these unusable items as “INFESTED WITH BED BUGS” so that others will not use them and continue to spread the infestation.
- Empty dressers, nightstands, and closets. Remove all items from floors and surfaces. Inspect every item for signs of bed bugs. Using sturdy plastic bags, bag all clothing, shoes, boxes, toys, stored goods, etc. Bag washable and non-washable items separately. Take care not to tear the bags, and seal them well.
- Vacuum floors, including inside closets. Pay special attention to corners, cracks, and dark places.
- Vacuum all furniture, including inside drawers and nightstands. Vacuum mattresses, box springs, and upholstered furniture, being sure to remove and vacuum all sides of loose cushions, as well as the undersides of furniture.
- Remove the vacuum bag, seal it in a plastic bag, and discard it.
- Clean all machine-washable bedding drapes, clothing, etc. Use the hottest water the machine provides, and dry at highest heat setting. Take other items to a dry cleaner, but be sure to advise the dry cleaner that the items are infested. For items that cannot be washed or dry cleaned, it may be possible to kill the infestation by placing the sealed bags in a freezer for 48 hours. Discard any items that cannot be decontaminated.
- Move furniture toward the center of the room, so that technicians can easily treat carpet edges where bed bugs congregate, as well as walls and furniture surfaces. Be sure to leave easy access to closets.

Bed bugs are resilient, efficient, highly mobile pests. Of all the pests that plague apartment buildings — rats, cockroaches, ants, mice — bed bugs are the most difficult to control. Successful control requires the full cooperation and active involvement of property managers, pest control professionals, and tenants.