



The Return of Bed Bugs: Challenges for the Hospitality Industry

What are Bed Bugs?

In the past few years, reports about a global resurgence of bed bugs have alarmed hoteliers and their guests. Bed bugs are small, reddish-brown wingless insects with flat oval bodies. They are usually about a quarter inch long and an eighth-inch wide. Bed bugs remain hidden in dark concealed places until they emerge to feed, typically at night or in darkened rooms during daytime hours. Bed bugs cannot fly, but they are highly mobile, and can cling to fibrous material such as drapes, upholstery, bedding, clothing, and soft luggage. Bed bug eggs, nymphs, and adults cling to guests' clothing, shoes, luggage, golf bags, and other items. Though bed bugs are not known to transmit any infectious diseases, their presence makes most people uncomfortable, both physically and psychologically.

Though bed bugs may be found in any residential property, they are a particular problem in hotels and motels, which experience a high turnover of guests. A single infested room can result in customer complaints, lost business, increased legal costs, and damaged reputation. While bed bugs cannot be eliminated, they can be controlled with a sound management plan, prompt action, and continued vigilance.

Take Steps to Prevent Infestation

Because almost every hotel or motel will experience bed bugs at some time, it's essential to have a plan in place to recognize, prevent, and respond to outbreaks. A timely, appropriate response will often be sufficient to satisfy affected guests, preserve the hotel's reputation, and head off litigation, and will thus be more cost-efficient in the long run. Effective planning requires the involvement of hotel management, employees, and a reliable, competent pest control professional. An effective plan will cover:

- **Awareness and Training.** Ensure that all staff can identify bed bugs and the signs of an infestation. Offer refresher training annually or as needed. Maintain training records. Local pest control professionals may provide the training.
- **Appropriate Furnishings.** Choose new furnishings that are least likely to harbor bed bugs. Avoid built-in furniture, as this is extremely difficult to remove, dismantle, and clean should an infestation occur. Use leather or vinyl upholstery; choose metal, glass, or laminate furniture over wood; and install hard floors (wood, tile, linoleum, etc.) instead of carpets or rugs. Purchase only new mattresses, and cover them with vinyl or anti-allergy covers. Avoid bedspreads, bed skirts, or drapes which touch the floor. Keep bed frames, bedside tables, and headboards away from walls and drapes.
- **Inspection and Monitoring.** Early detection and eradication is essential to preventing or limiting infestations. Schedule regular inspections that will cover all guest rooms and common areas on a rotating basis. Focus inspections on dark, hidden, protected areas, with

special attention to fabrics, wood, and paper surfaces preferred by bed bugs.

- **Housekeeping.** Good housekeeping will help control bed bugs. Train housekeepers to look for and report bed bugs and their signs. Target vacuuming to areas typically favored by bedbugs, especially dark and concealed areas near and around beds.
- **Maintenance.** To limit areas where bed bugs can hide, and to prevent the spread of bed bugs, keep property in good repair. Use caulk, foam, paint, or other sealants to close cracks, crevices, and other openings in walls, ceilings, and floors and between rooms. Re-glue loose wallpaper, and patch cracked or peeling paint or blemishes in walls or ceilings.

Responding to an Outbreak

- Close suspect room(s) and those immediately adjoining, above, and below. Inspect the room(s) to determine that bed bugs are, in fact, present. If bed bugs are present, remove the guest(s) to clean and treat the room(s).
- Clean the affected room(s), and have a licensed pest control professional carry out treatment. Do not allow them to be used until the pest control professional indicates that treatment is complete, the bugs are gone, and the room(s) are clean.
- After several days, conduct a follow-up inspection, and treat the room(s) again if any sign of living insects is found. It may be necessary to apply two or more treatments to achieve full eradication.
- Inspection, cleaning, treatment, and follow-up may take several weeks. While there certainly will be lost income during this period, it will be more cost-effective in the long run to eradicate the infestation for good rather than deal with continued complaints from guests, negative publicity, and perhaps even a lawsuit from an affected guest.

Responding to Guests' Concerns

Hotel management and staff must be ready to address guests' concerns. Guests who find bed bugs in their rooms will be disgusted and angry. Acknowledge guests' concerns; offer information and assistance. Inspect the room(s) to verify the presence of bed bugs; offer a clean room or a refund. If a guest has been bitten, offer assistance in obtaining medical attention. Offer to launder clothing and clean affected luggage. Provide information to guests on how to avoid transfer of bedbugs to their homes. Document all actions.

For detailed information on preparing a bed bug response plan, request the Sequoia *Risk Management Guide* "Understanding and Responding to Bed Bugs: Issues and Guidance for the Hospitality Industry."

NOTE: This document does not address selection or application of pesticides, which must be undertaken only by a licensed pest control professional.