



NEWS

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Illinois Department of Public Health

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Bed Bugs Are Making a Comeback in Illinois

State's top doc encourages education and prevention steps to combat bed bugs

SPRINGFIELD -- Bed bugs are on the rise in Illinois after a dramatic decline in the 1940s and 1950s. A couple reasons for the return are more world-wide travel and today's insecticides, although safer for people, are less effective in killing these bugs. Bed bugs are small, flat insects, usually reddish-brown and up to ¼-inch long. Bed bugs do not fly or hop, but can move quickly across floors and walls. Bed bugs most commonly enter hotels or residences by "hitch-hiking" on a suitcase or backpack, used furniture or other objects moved from one building to another. Bed bugs can survive several months without feeding.

At night, bed bugs leave their hiding places in mattresses, box springs, bed frames, nightstands, curtains, couches, and wall voids, and behind baseboards, door and window frames, and carpet edges to feed. The bugs feed on the blood of animals, including people and pets. The bug's beak-like mouth painlessly pierces its victim, injects saliva and sucks up the host's blood, in about three to five minutes.

"The Illinois Department of Public Health is seeing an increase in the number of calls from the public and from local health departments about bed bug infestations," said Dr. Damon T. Arnold, state public health director. "To help reduce this problem, I encourage everyone to learn the signs of bed bug infestations, how the bugs spread, what you can do to prevent getting them and what to do if you find bed bugs."

Although bed bugs are not known to transmit disease, their bites can cause an intense itch and scratching could produce secondary infections. Bed bugs may be brought into well-maintained hotels and clean homes because all they need to survive is a place to hide and a host to supply their only food – blood. New infestations may go undetected when only a few bed bugs are present, allowing the infestation to grow and spread.

Signs of infestation:

- Spots of blood left on bed sheets indicate bed bug biting.
- Brownish-black specks (feces) and bed bug “shells” (shed exoskeletons) indicate a bed bug infestation.
- A peculiar musty raspberry odor from bed bug secretions may be noticed where many bed bugs are present.

How bed bugs are spread:

- Bed bugs attach to luggage, backpacks, clothing, beds and furniture, and move when and where those objects are moved.
- Bed bug outbreaks are often traced to travel, particularly travel in a country where bed bugs are common.
- Use of secondhand furniture, particularly beds and couches, is another way bed bugs can be spread.
- Also, bed bugs can quickly spread from one unit to the next in multi-unit dwellings such as apartment buildings.

To prevent getting bed bug:

- Keep all beds pulled slightly away from walls, furniture, and curtains. Make sure bedclothes don't touch the floor. Wrap carpet tape or duct tape (sticky side out) around bed legs, or use traps, to prevent bed bugs from climbing onto beds.
- Keep the floor under and around beds free of clutter.
- Change sheets and pillow cases weekly (wash in either hot water or machine dry at medium or high heat).
- Use fitted sheets on the mattress, or tuck sheets under the mattress.
- Use light-colored sheets and check for discolored spots when removing them from the bed.
- Look for signs of bed bugs along the seams of the mattress in places you stay (hotels, motels) and keep your bags and luggage off the floor and bed.
- Do not place anything (luggage, blankets, pillows, stuffed toys) that may contain bed bugs onto any bed. Be particularly careful when returning from a trip.
- Only sleep on beds. Do not sleep on couches or in upholstered chairs.
- Inspect all used furniture carefully for bed bugs before bringing it into a home – do not scavenge furniture left on the street.

If there is a bed bug infestation:

- Vacuum infested areas (including mattresses and box springs) and dispose of the contents in a sealed garbage bag or trash container.
- Remove the pillows, sheets, blankets, mattress, and box springs and wash sheets and blankets. Dry blankets, sheets and pillows at medium or high heat.

- Items that cannot be completely inspected and treated should be thrown out.
- Tightly seal mattresses and box springs inside mattress encasements specially designed to exclude bed bugs.
- Pesticides can be applied directly into cracks and crevices harboring bed bugs. Hiring a licensed pest management professional may be preferable to doing it yourself because effective control requires experience, time and special pesticide application equipment. Effective control of bed bugs will probably require more than one pesticide treatment. Owners and occupants have an important role and will need to assist the pest control professional. Affording access for inspection and treatment is crucial and excess clutter that provides hiding places for bed bugs should be removed. Since bed bugs can move throughout a building, adjoining rooms and apartments should always be inspected, and treated if bed bugs are found. Do not apply pesticides to mattresses, bedding or furniture unless the pesticide's label specifically allows application to these items. Do not apply pesticides to surfaces of mattresses, bedding or furniture that will come in contact with people. Treatments such as "fogging" and "bug bombs" are ineffective against well-hidden bed bugs and may drive them into other rooms or apartments and spread the infestation. Pesticide applications should not be done unless bed bugs have been identified by a qualified specialist.

For more information on bed bugs, log onto www.idph.state.il.us/envhealth/pbedbugs.htm.

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