

# Bed bugs: Risk tips for avoiding infestations

Allianz Risk Consulting

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## Introduction

Can bed bugs be prevented from invading a commercial place of business? In short: no. They are opportunistic, nondiscriminatory and - worst of all – stealthy. And they will find a way to get into unprotected buildings where necessary precautions for prevention have been neglected and where the right environment for infestation exists. Despite the worry, however, there are ways to prepare a property that will mitigate as much as possible an infestation. This bulletin will offer risk awareness do's and don'ts for preventing and controlling bed bug infestations.

## Bed bug basics

Bed bugs are small, parasitic insects that feed on the blood of people and animals. They are found worldwide and can withstand temperatures from around 32°F (0°C) to 122°F (50°C). Bed bugs were largely eradicated in the US until recent decades, when they began to spread rapidly throughout North America<sup>1</sup>.

Bed bugs typically hide in the seams of mattresses, bed frames, headboards, dressers and even behind wall-paper – in any small opening that is available. This is why one of the first things you should do while traveling is to check your sleeping area thoroughly for bed bugs or signs that they're around (like feces).

## Bed bug traits

**Opportunistic:** Bed bugs will hitch a ride with you from your home to any stops along the way – whether at a hotel, restaurant or office. If you are a traveler, visiting many cities (and hotels), it is possible you can actually distribute these bed bugs from one place to another, allowing them to colonize.

**Nondiscriminatory:** Bed bugs proliferate anywhere – from a “no-star” motel to a 5-star luxury resort. A well maintained and sanitary place of business will not prevent bed bugs from colonizing.

**Stealthy:** Bed bugs are nocturnal, coming out at night from their hiding places, traveling up to 20 feet, to where they can reach a human or animal for a blood meal.

Since one cannot prevent bed bugs from infesting a place of business, the best course of action is early recognition and control. Implementing strict policies and procedures and best practices can prevent unnecessary customer complaints, eradication costs and business interruption. They can also protect the business' brand and reputation.



1. Dr. Joseph Mercola, *Don't let the bedbugs bite*, Mercola's Take Control of Your Health website, July 29, 2015

## Responding to guest or customer complaints: Do's and don'ts

### Do's

- Train staff on how to identify, report, respond, remediate and review bed bug complaints
- Best practices-trained bed bug staff should make routine scheduled inspection of all units or rooms
- Housekeepers completing the room change-outs should be making an effort for early recognition, especially during the course of bed-making
- Take all complaints of bed bugs seriously
- Offer the guest another room that has been inspected by a trained supervisor
- Luggage and personal belongings should be treated prior to relocating to the new room
- Verify that bed bug exposure does exist in the room in question. Many alleged claims of bed bug bites have been deemed other types of insect bites. This alone can save significant costs from unnecessary remediation and other expenses related to bed bugs. Trained staff personnel or pest control operators can validate whether or not bed bugs are present. Retain bed bug or other insect samples if found (usually on a piece of clear tape) for further claims review
- Offer complimentary professional cleaning of guest's clothes and luggage
- Use discretion when proposing other offers to make guest happy (take care of the guest and possibly resolve the issue while they are in your hotel). Assist guest in seeking medical assistance when necessary

### Don't's

- Dispute the claim of bed bugs with the guest
- Admit guilt or allow guest to record conversation (verbal or written)
- Give past stories of bed bug issues
- Allow conversations to take place where other guests are present
- Try to make light of the situation by making jokes or other similar remarks
- Offer to pay for medical attention
- Re-occupy the room until a full inspection (and cleaning if needed) has been completed

## Proactive control measures

- Establish a referral/retention relationship with a local licensed, insured and reputable pest control company to respond to bed bug incidents. Include inspecting the adjacent rooms, as well as those above and below the infected unit
- Offer refresher training and periodic review of bed bug protocols including training first responders, controlling access to the room in question and using eradication measures upon bed bug validation
- Establish public relations protocols, referring all media inquiries to your corporate office. Unauthorized staff should never respond to media requests



## Other risk mitigation tips

- Offer refresher training for recognition and control prior to peak bed bug season (Summer)
- Implement focused inspections by housekeepers during room change-out periods to include baseboards, mattresses, pillows, etc.
- Encase mattresses and box springs with cover
- Use a licensed insured and bonded pest control company on retainer (they also can conduct inspections)
- Include K9 (dogs trained to sniff out bed bugs) inspections
- Use pheromone traps in rooms
- Use garment steamers to treat luggage and clothing that may become contaminated with bed bugs
- Initiate procedures and protocol to have all the right tools on hand to properly assist guests from spreading bed bugs
- Use a trained response team which have high resolution cameras and other tools including clear tape to collect suspected bed bugs and physical signs (e.g., hatchlings, excrement, etc.) for validation