



Risk Management *Tips*

Bedbugs are Making a Comeback—Are You at Risk?

Once thought to be in demise, bedbugs (*Cimex lectularius*) are not only showing up in beds, they are making their way into businesses—causing some to shut down temporarily for treatment. According to www.bed-bug.org, bedbugs are often found under carpet seam edges, in cushions, where ceilings and walls meet, behind light switches and outlets, in clothes, and even between the pages of books. It appears that nothing is immune.

Is your organization at risk?

According to Mayo Clinic, the risk of encountering bedbugs increases in places with a high occupancy turnover—such as residential care facilities, day care facilities, group homes, health care clinics, recreational programs, and shelters.

What you should know

Bedbugs are reddish brown, oval, flat, and about the size of an apple seed. These insects easily “hitchhike” from one place to another. Bedbugs don’t care if their environment is clean or dirty. All they need is a warm host and a place to hide. There is no evidence that bloodborne diseases can be transmitted to other people.



What are the symptoms?

In general, bedbug bites are red, may have a darker spot in the middle, itch, and are arranged in a rough line or cluster. Some people have no reaction while others experience severe itching, blisters, or hives. Seek treatment from a doctor for severe skin reactions.

What should you do if you suspect bedbugs?

Thoroughly examine crevices in walls, mattresses, and furniture. You may want to inspect at night when bedbugs are active. Signs to look for include:

- Dark specks (excrement). Typically found along seams or crevices.
- Empty exoskeletons (light brown in color). Bedbugs molt five times before becoming adults.
- Bloody smears. Check cushions or sheets where an engorged bedbug may have been crushed accidentally. Since bedbugs can disperse easily, inspect adjoining rooms. Consider a professional exterminator, if in doubt.



(continued)

Treatment and Control

Eliminating bedbugs can be very difficult because these nocturnal creatures breed rapidly, hide well, and can live for more than a year without eating. According to Mayo Clinic, your best bet may be to hire a professional exterminator, who may use a combination of treatments and require several visits.

Non-chemical treatments may include:

- Vacuuming. Although vacuum cleaners cannot reach all hiding places, they can remove bedbugs from cracks and crevices.
- Hot water. Washing clothes and other items in water at least 120° F (49°C) can kill bedbugs.
- Clothes dryer. Placing wet or dry items in the dryer at 120°F (49°C) or higher for 20 minutes will kill bedbugs and their eggs.
- Freezing. Bedbugs are vulnerable to temperatures below 32°F (0°C), but you need to freeze the items for several days.

Some professional exterminators use portable devices to produce steam, heat, or freezing temperatures to kill bedbugs. You may have to throw out heavily infested items, such as couches or mattresses.

A professional can provide additional advice on ways to prevent infestations, which may include:

- Secondhand items. Inspect used items carefully before bringing them into your facility.
- Birds and bats. Eliminate any neighboring bird and bat habitats that may serve as a refuge for bedbugs.
- Clients and staff. People can be a carrier for bedbugs. Set up procedures to help reduce the chance of infestation, such as:
 - Store personal belongings off the floor.
 - Keep clothes racks away from beds and furniture.

A final thought

As a business manager, it is important to take an aggressive approach to manage the bedbug challenge.

As a matter of due diligence, Secret Wardle, counselors at law, suggest the following:

- Use a professional exterminator
- Properly maintain and preserve documentation
- Conduct prevention inspections
- Devise a method to address complaints
- Document remediation attempts
- Perform follow-up inspections

A single bedbug complaint can dramatically damage your reputation. By taking a proactive risk management approach, you just may be able to “sleep tight and not let the bedbugs bite.”

Additional information regarding bedbugs can be found at:

<http://www.bedbugcentral.com>

<http://bedbugregistry.com>

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/bedbugs/DS00663>

If you have a safety or risk management question or a suggestion for a topic, please contact Markel's Risk Management Department at safety1st@markelcorp.com.