

Bedbugs

Wikipedia describes bedbugs as small, elusive, parasitic insects of the family Cimicidae. “The term usually refers to species that feed preferentially on human blood; all insects in this family live by feeding exclusively on the blood of warm-blooded animals. The name 'bed bug' is derived from the insect's preferred habitat of infesting houses and especially beds or other common areas where people may sleep. Bedbugs, though not strictly nocturnal, are mainly active at night and are capable of feeding unnoticed on their hosts.”

With the widespread use of DDT in the 1950s and 1960s, bedbugs substantially disappeared from the developed world though infestations were still common elsewhere. Since then, whether because of increased world travel or newly adapted resistance to current insecticides, bedbugs are making a comeback. And contrary to popular opinion, that comeback is not merely in the homes of the poor; rather they are showing up everywhere - in fine hotels, upscale stores, middle class homes and certainly in multi-housing residential properties.

Because bedbugs are often hitchhikers, there is no way of predicting where they will show up next. Properties, therefore, should be on the lookout for them and must have a way to respond quickly and effectively if they appear in the community. We recommend the following:

- Absent proof that a particular resident brought an infestation to the property, “no fault” policies work best. It is often impossible to know how bedbugs arrived at a particular residence or how long they have been there, as they have been known to lie dormant for up to two years. A “no fault” policy, which encourages residents to report the infestation before it spreads, is usually the most effective tool for dealing with the situation early.
- Before renting a unit, inspect it to ensure that it is free of bedbugs. Never rent a unit that you know has a bedbug infestation in it.
- Carefully develop a policy and protocol for dealing with an infestation before it occurs. Communicate that policy to all residents and staff. A bedbug addendum that sets out responsibilities in the event of an infestation should be part of every lease agreement.
- Don't ignore a report of bedbugs. While it is always possible that someone will inaccurately report an infestation, it is better to investigate and find nothing than to ignore the report and have a larger infestation develop later.
- Educate staff and residents about how bedbugs enter a community and how their presence in the community may be a health and safety issue for

themselves and other residents. Used mattresses, drapes, upholstered furniture, and stuffed animals are prime carriers of bedbugs, but even new items can be infested, for example, if they are transported in trucks that are infested. Bedbugs can spread from one unit to another if someone drags an infested item through the parking lot or they can migrate on their own from one unit to another.

- Forget about letting tenants treat their own infestations. Treatment for bedbugs is a job for licensed professionals only and ineffective treatments can simply exacerbate the problem.
- Give the tenant whose unit is going to be treated a copy of the treatment protocol at least 48 hours prior to the start of the treatment so that he/she can be prepared for the treatment. Residents have their own responsibilities under the protocol and their failure to fully comply with the treatment means that the treatment will be ineffective and bedbugs will remain in the unit.
- Have consequences for failing to report infestations or failing to fully cooperate with the protocol. Residents who knowingly fail to report bedbugs, who obstruct or inhibit access to their units when treatment is necessary, or who ignore their own responsibilities under the protocol can be held responsible for subsequent necessary treatments and further infestations. Be sure your residents know that eradicating bedbugs in the community requires a team effort.
- If in doubt about how to proceed in a particular circumstance, contact legal counsel.