

Preventing a Bed Bug Infestation in Multi-Unit Housing and Group Living Environments

Furniture and Room Guidelines

Bed bugs thrive under certain conditions which are enhanced by the availability of hiding spots close to their human hosts. Bed bugs have a strong preference for paper and wood, over metal and plastic. Porous surfaces provide more humidity and egg-laying locations. Furniture choices can greatly contribute to the control of bed bugs.

Guidelines for furniture include:

- Replace wood frame beds with metal frame beds to discourage bed bug hiding and egg-laying on beds.
- Eliminate head boards completely. Bed bugs hide and thrive in head boards.
- Replace all plush furniture with metal and plastic, or items easily cleaned with soap and water.
- Bedding and pillows should be able to be placed in a dryer and tumbled on a high setting.
- Use only white or light colored sheets so bed bugs can be easily seen.
- Choose white baby cribs or paint wooden baby cribs white. Fill gaps in the frames with silicone caulk. This will make inspection easier and reduce the chance of infestation. Do not use pesticides on baby cribs!
- Vinyl-covered or seamless mattresses are recommended for adult beds and cribs.
- If vinyl mattresses or encasements have holes, consider repairing them with duct tape or discarding them.
- Do not discard regular (non-vinyl) mattresses, only to replace them with other regular mattresses. Bed bugs will re-infest the new bedding quickly. Use mattress encasements designed for bed bugs.
- If a box spring is being used, be sure to encase it too. The box spring is more likely to harbor bed bugs than the mattress.
- Wooden dressers, wardrobes, tables and other furniture can be painted white for easy inspection. Any crevices where a credit card will fit should first be sealed with caulking.
- Discard any wicker furniture. Wicker provides infinite harborage to bed bugs and is almost impossible to treat effectively.

Donations of clothing and household items

Donations of clothing, shoes, coats, toys and other personal belongings are vital to many programs that help the disadvantaged. But sometimes when people discover bed bugs in their homes, they discard many personal belongings, and it is unclear how much of these discarded personal belongings make it to the donation stream. It is therefore important to be very careful about bringing donated items, and the bed bugs they may harbor, into your facility or home.

Suggested precautions for donations include:

- Wash and/or DRY on a HOT setting, all clothing, shoes, coats, linens, blankets, and plush toys before distribution.
- Sort donations on a clean linoleum floor. Prevent the escape of bed bugs into your facility by sorting inside a perimeter of carpet (double-sided) tape placed around the working space. This creates a sticky barrier that bed bugs cannot cross.
- Shake out clothing; inspect books and toys carefully using the [Identification guide](#) in this manual.
- Do not accept cardboard boxes for donations to your facility. Instead use clear plastic bags.
- Keep sorted and laundered items sequestered (in sealed plastic bags or plastic totes with tight fitting lids) from items that have not been checked or treated.

Policy Statements for Shelters and Group Housing

Agencies and facilities managers should have policies in place that will help to prevent the spread of bed bugs. Suggested policy statements and reasoning include:

- Your belongings must be free of bed bugs, or you must be willing to work with facility staff to rid your belongings of bed bugs. – *This will prevent the introduction of bed bugs into our facility, and will help the resident to avoid future bed bug issues.*
- You may not bring into this facility items collected from the street, discarded items, donated furniture. – *With the increased number of bed bug cases, items on the streets are much more likely to contain bed bugs (the reason for being discarded). Therefore it is not safe to bring discarded or abandoned items into our facility.*

- If you have possibly been exposed to bed bugs, or suspect that you may have bed bug bites, you must tell the facilities manager. – *Early detection and management is very important for the control of bed bugs. Otherwise the number of bed bugs will increase rapidly.*
- The client must consult with a medical provider or social worker if bed bugs are suspected. – *There is help for clients with mental, physical, and financial needs that limit their ability to deal with bed bugs.*
- You must follow pre-treatment guidelines for a room you occupy. – *Following pretreatment guidelines will allow management to help get the bed bug infestation under control. Without cooperation, control will not be possible.*
- You **must not** use spray, fog, or dust pesticides on your own to treat for bed bugs or any other pests. – *Foggers cause bed bugs to spread, over-the-counter sprays may be ineffective, and bed bug control requires experience to know where to place insecticides to be effective against bed bugs.*

**SITE-SPECIFIC GUIDELINES FOR
MANAGEMENT AND PREVENTION OF
BED BUG INFESTATIONS**

Multi-Unit Housing

Bed bug infestations in multi-family housing can be particularly troublesome. An infestation in one apartment, if not handled properly, can spread to adjacent units or throughout a building and affect many people. The information in this section is designed to help residents and property managers work together to fight bed bugs in multi-family housing, and to provide specific suggestions for multi-family housing operators in handling an infestation.

In order to successfully eradicate a bed bug infestation, it is essential that all parties involved work together. Unfortunately, it is all too common for residents and property managers to let their frustration manifest itself by blaming each other. There are a few important ideas to keep in mind:

- Nobody asks for a bed bug infestation. Regardless of how the infestation started, it was certainly unintentional.
- No one profits or benefits from an infestation continuing. If there is no cooperation, everyone loses.
- Many people are uninformed about bed bugs, and don't understand what must be done to treat them. If you feel that a resident, landlord, or property manager isn't handling the situation properly, suggest that they read through this manual.
- Once a bed bug infestation has been identified, it takes a lot of work to get rid of it. Effective treatment requires the cooperation of three parties working together: resident, landlord and pest management professional. Without the participation of all three it will be nearly impossible to eliminate an infestation.

There should be no shame associated with having bed bugs in an apartment. It is not an issue of cleanliness – although clutter makes it more difficult to eradicate bed bugs, cleanliness cannot prevent the problem from occurring. Denial, shame and blame only make the situation worse. Once an infestation has been identified, the most important thing is to be proactive about treating it.