Since 1999, the resurgence of the bed bug, once nearly eradicated in the United States, has resulted in a five-fold increase in bed bug complaints in this country, according to the National Pest Management Association. The stigma associated with bed bugs leads many to believe their presence indicates an unclean environment or poor personal hygiene. However, bed bug infestations have nothing to do with cleanliness. They do not feed on crumbs, dirt, or anything else that one associates with an unclean environment or poor hygiene.

Bed bugs feed on blood rather indiscriminately, and places where a steady food supply exists are high on their list of hangouts. This makes any lodging facility, from a five-star resort to a highway motor lodge, a prime location for bed bugs to take up residence.

How does this happen? One factor is an increase in international travel. As more people travel abroad, they unknowingly bring these dubious hitchhikers to the U.S. with them.

Bed bugs can infiltrate a piece of luggage left on the floor or placed on a bed in an infested area, and then lie dormant, without feeding, for more than a year. Any place that piece of luggage travels from that point has the potential to become infested with bed bugs. Once they take up residence, these nocturnal feeders spend their daylight hours lying in wait for their next meal in places like headboards, picture frames, and nightstands.

One can surmise that a high-end resort without a proactive prevention, detection, and treatment plan has a higher probability of becoming infested with bed bugs because their more affluent guests are more likely to have traveled to these places where bed bugs thrive, such as Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.

Another contributing factor to the resurrection of the bed bug is the curtailed use of pesticides as we struggle to become a more environmentally conscious society. Residual pesticides such as DDT, which were used in the 1940s and ’50s, have given way to less toxic, gel-based “bait” pesticides. Since bed bugs are not attracted to bait, these pesticides are much less effective for bed bugs than they are for bait-susceptible insects.

Management

Although it’s nearly impossible to prevent bed bugs from entering your hotel, with proper protocols in place and followed vigilantly, early detection and immediate treatment of infestations can prevent a more severe infestation. Aside from taking the steps outlined below to possibly prevent a claim, taking a proactive approach to bed bug detection and eradication can also make allegations more defensible should a claim arise.

While these steps will not prevent bed bugs from entering guest rooms, they will help minimize the risk of infestation should a guest unknowingly bring these unwelcome guests to your property:

- Encase mattresses, box springs, and pillows in impermeable casings with small-toothed zipper closures that zip completely

Together we’ll go far
without a gap. There are casings made especially for this purpose which are effective in preventing bed bugs from getting into pillows and mattresses. These casings also prevent any bed bugs already present from getting out. Encasements also tend to make bed bugs easier to detect should they be introduced.

- Launder all bed linens in hot water (120 degrees Fahrenheit or above) and dry on the hottest dryer setting after each guest checks out.
- Provide luggage stands for guests so that they do not need to place luggage on the beds or carpet.

**What to do if a guest complains of bed bugs in their room**

- Relocate the guest to a different room, after performing a thorough check of the new room for signs of bed bugs.
- Perform a thorough inspection of the allegedly affected room.
- Contact a professional pest control service with experience in bed bugs to inspect and treat if necessary. Retain documentation of any inspection, treatment, or other correspondence.
- Remove all bed linens and launder in hot water (120 degrees Fahrenheit or above) and dry on the hottest dryer setting between each guest.
- Other fabrics that cannot be laundered, such as curtains, carpets, and sofa cushions, should be steam-cleaned.

**Detection and routine inspection**

Early detection of the presence of bed bugs is the key to effective treatment and control:

- Train housekeeping staff to look for signs of bedbugs:
  - Tiny dark specks of bed bug excrement on bedding, pillows, and in the seams of mattresses or box springs;
  - Egg casings shed when the bed bug eggs hatch. These look like small, translucent seed husks, smaller than a sesame seed, and tend to look like “dust bunnies” when they collect on a surface such as a floor or furniture.
- In some cases, the actual live bugs can be found in small spaces, such as behind picture frames or headboards, around the edges of baseboards, or in the cracks and crevices of wooden furniture. Because they are nocturnal, bed bugs are not normally seen out in the open.
- If you suspect bed bugs are present, it is best to let a pest control professional who has experience with bed bugs determine the existence and extent of the infestation. There are also a number of companies that utilize “bed bug dogs” to detect the pests by scent. The use of bed bug dogs may, in some cases, detect an infestation earlier than it would be detected by visible signs.
- Routine inspections by a trained pest control professional should be performed at least bi-monthly.
- Retain all service documentation and correspondence in case you are required to defend a claim.

**Treatment**

If bed bugs have been confirmed, it is important to begin treatment as soon as possible to prevent further infestation. Most importantly, do not attempt to treat bed bugs with store-bought foggers and sprays. These are largely ineffective, as they cannot reach the numerous tiny crevices in which bed bugs hide.

A pest control professional with experience dealing with bed bugs should be called. Many exterminators treat with pesticides, such as parathyroid flushing agents and silica gel dusts.

However, alternative treatments, using extreme heat or cold, have been developed in an effort to treat bed bug infestations in a more environmentally safe and efficient manner. These methods are often more desirable to the hospitality industry because they can be applied to a very localized area. They are much less obtrusive than pesticide or fumigation, which can require evacuation of a large area in order to treat a small affected area.

Additionally, some of these treatments can effectively eliminate bed bugs from linens, curtains, mattresses, and other items that may have to be replaced when using traditional pesticide treatments, and there is no chance of contaminating food or other items that may be ingested.

*Information provided by the Resort Hotel Association.*

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