

# KEEP OUT!

## Keeping bed bugs out of your facility



By Ron Harrison, Ph.D.

**C**hicago and the Midwest have received a lot of attention lately for bed bug activity, but the Windy City isn't the only city under attack from these bloodsuckers. Earlier this year, Orkin released its rankings of the top bed-bug infested U.S. cities in order of the number of bedbug treatments performed. Chicago took the top spot, followed by Detroit, Los Angeles, Denver, Cincinnati, and Columbus, Ohio, but bed bugs are on the rise nationwide. In fact, at Orkin we saw our bed bug treatments increase a third from 2011 to 2012.

After surveying the entire country, we found that bed bugs are certainly active in the Midwest and Northeast—cities in these areas

claim 14 of the top 20 spots on our list—and that trend has continued so far this year. Colder temperatures and different climates may be factors, but there is no hard scientific answer as to why many bed bugs are targeting areas above the Mason-Dixon Line east of the Mississippi River. Some feel that the core temperature and humidity inside a building play a role, and in different areas of the country, interior temperatures vary depending on the climate outside.

Nevertheless, we do know a lot about these resurgent creatures. Like many pests, they are nocturnal, prolific breeders that can spread through a facility fast and travel along with humans to new destinations. But unlike other insects such as cockroaches, which survive and thrive in locations with poor sanitation, bed bugs can overrun facilities from hotels to hospitals that have the most stringent sanitation practices. No matter how clean or well-maintained your facility is, it can still be at risk.

Bed bugs seeking a blood meal are attracted to their human hosts at night and then disappear into cracks and crevices, behind picture frames, bed frames, baseboards, and other areas during the day. Once inside, bed bugs can spread quickly from room to room on hospital beds and environmental services equipment such as laundry carts.

Treating bed bugs can be a real challenge with dire consequences if the wrong materials and methods are used. As a result, the healthcare industry must be vigilant in the defense against this pest and partner with an experienced and knowledgeable pest management professional to regularly monitor for bed bugs, selecting the appropriate treatment options should an infestation arise.

Last year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) advised the public of the misuse of pesticides to treat bed bug infestations. According to the advisory, some pesticides being applied indoors have been approved only for outdoor use. Even pesticides that are approved for indoor use must be used by trained and licensed professionals according to the product label.

The CDC, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Association for the Healthcare Environment recommend an Integrated Pest Management plan to help beat bed bugs. If you haven't already done so, talk with your pest management provider about implementing a proactive monitoring program and putting together an appropriate action plan to respond to any bed bug sightings.

While it's impossible to prevent bed bugs from getting inside your facility, there are many steps you can take to help your health-care organization keep them from taking over.

### Start with your staff

Your staff can be your eyes and also the first responders to any signs of bed bug activity. For this reason, it is essential that your staff be trained on how to recognize the signs of a bed bug infestation and how to respond to any issues. Ask your pest management provider to provide staff training. Most providers offer free training and can supply educational materials such as tip sheets and checklists.

If bed bugs do show up in your facility, the infestation isn't the only thing you'll need to manage, so it's important to understand the human resources implications of bed bugs. Be open with your employees so they can help monitor the process and communicate with patients about any concerns. Establish a bed bug policy for your employees that will encourage them to take preventive measures and report any possible infestations, whether at work or at home. Remember, employees must be vigilant even outside of work hours so they don't bring bed bugs into your facility from home.

### Know what you're looking for

Bed bugs are about the size and color of an apple seed, but don't expect to walk in on one hanging out in the open. You are more likely to find them in their favorite hiding places. They can be found in mattress seams, in the corners of box springs, under buckling wallpaper, or in the edges of carpet.

Even if live bed bugs aren't present, you can still look for their calling cards—small, ink-colored stains or cast skins they leave



*Bed bugs can be found in the crevices of mattresses, as well as behind picture frames, bed frames, and baseboards in facilities across the country.*

behind on mattress seams and ceilings, under seat cushions, and behind headboards.

If you find any of these signs, you should alert your pest management professional immediately.

### Leave it alone

If activity is spotted in a room inside your facility, take that room—and the surrounding rooms—out of service immediately and don't disturb the area any more than you have to. Leave everything in these rooms and keep the scene untouched so that pest management professionals can diagnose the source of the problem.

Work with facility management and medical staff to move patients to a new room, but leave everything else behind for treatment.

### Lend a helping hand

While you don't want to move anything in a room infested with bed bugs before a pest management professional inspects the area, you may be asked to help prepare the room prior to treatment.

You can help by pulling furniture toward the center of the room, loosening items attached to walls, providing access to cabinets or plumbing voids, and pulling up carpet around the room's perimeter.

It's extremely important, however, that employees assisting with room preparations do not bring bed bugs home with them. Make sure to take the necessary precautions to protect employees from this scenario.

Keep in mind that, while treating a bed bug problem can be costly, the damage these pests can do—disturbing patients, causing complaints about sanitary conditions, and damaging your reputation—can cost your facility even more in the long run. By working with a pest management professional to proactively monitor for and treat bed bugs, you can quickly and efficiently resolve any issues and decrease the chances of experiencing a severe infestation. ●

## Keep 'em from taking over

### Train your staff

Most pest management providers provide free training: ask your provider to provide staff training.

### Know where to look

Bed bugs are about the size and color of an apple seed and are likely to be found in mattress seams, in the corners of box springs, under buckling wallpaper, or in the edges of carpet.

### Do not disturb

If activity is spotted, take that area out of service immediately and don't disturb it any more than you have to.

### Help prep the affected area

You may be asked to help prepare the room prior to treatment—help by pulling furniture toward the center of the room, loosening items attached to walls, providing access to cabinets, and pulling up carpet around the room's perimeter.



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