What to do when bedbugs invade your facility

First sign of bedbugs requires immediate action

After reading this article, you will be able to:

➤ Explain the appropriate steps to resolve a bedbug problem
➤ List ways to identify a possible infestation

Unfortunately, due to the nature of the hospital setting, it’s almost a guarantee that you will have to deal with a bedbug infestation at some point.

Numerous hospitals across the United States have reported problems with bedbugs in the past few months. A recent survey conducted by Infogroup/ORC on behalf of Enforcer® brand pest control products revealed that one in 10 Americans say they or someone they know has had a bedbug problem. That statistic jumps to two in 10 in the Northeast, where areas such as New York City have experienced more extensive outbreaks.

The bad news is there is no real way to prevent these bugs from entering your facility. However, quick and effective interventions can stop the spread and reduce the risks of a serious infestation in patient rooms, lounges, waiting rooms, or virtually anywhere else in your healthcare facility.

Bedbugs are here to stay; the trick is learning to spot them and then quickly resolving the issue, says Jeffrey B. Tucker, BCE, a consulting entomologist.
for Entomology Associates, Inc., in Houston who has served as a bedbug consultant for hospitals around the country.

“It’s important to understand that there is no building that is occupied by humans that is [resistant] to bedbug infestation,” Tucker says. “They have been found in every type of human residence and every mode of transportation. Bedbugs don’t care.”

**Developing a plan**

Hospitals are susceptible to a bedbug infestation simply because of the sheer number of people (patients, staff, visitors, etc.) who pass through the doors night and day.

No area is off-limits to bedbugs, says Tucker. He has seen infestations occur in patient rooms, waiting areas, staff areas, doctors’ and nurses’ lounges, booths in hospital cafeterias, and in the cubicles for secretarial and support staff.

Knowing that bedbugs are an imminent threat, hospitals need to build a policy regarding what to do if an infestation occurs. “A policy for bedbugs has to first acknowledge they are a problem—and they are likely to investigated by someone who knows the difference between a mosquito bite, something that is not a bite at all, or [something that has] the potential for bedbugs,” Tucker says.

**Visual evidence.** If a nurse walks in the room and sees something shoot across the bedsheets or the floor, he or she should alert the IC department for further investigation. It may just be a harmless insect, but a quick reaction to a potential problem is the best way to prevent further spread.

**Brown spots.** Bedbugs are hard to see, so it’s often easier to identify them by the feces they leave behind, says House. “[It] basically looks like little brown spots, but they show up all over mattresses or pillowcases, so if the bugs are hiding in crevices or against the wall behind baseboards, you would still see the evidence that they were there while an individual was sleeping,” she says.

Be especially aware of an outbreak if your facility has an in-house long-term care facility or a psychiatric ward where patients stay for an extended period of time, says Tucker.

You can also prevent a possible infestation by barring as many personal items as possible. Wheelchairs are especially prone to bedbugs, so some hospitals choose to make patients use hospital wheelchairs exclusively.

For more information on identifying bedbugs, refer to the Ohio Department of Health Bedbug Fact Sheet on pp. 6–7.
Bed Bugs: Know the Facts

What are bed bugs?
The common bed bug (*Cimex lectularius*) is an insect that feeds on human blood. They are often found near sleeping areas in the seams of mattresses, box springs, cracks and crevices in bed frames, and usually spread to gaps behind baseboards, pictures, wallpaper and electrical outlets. They may hitchhike into a home on used furniture, clothing or other items brought from infested areas.

What do they look like?
Adult bed bugs are reddish-brown, wingless insects about the size of an apple seed (1/4 – 3/8-inch long). When viewed from the side, they are flat, which is why they can fit into such narrow spaces. Newly hatched bugs are white or yellowish and resemble the adults, but are smaller. Bed bug eggs are white, about the size of a pinhead (1/10-inch long) and are found in crevices in clusters of 10-50 eggs.

Can bed bugs cause disease?
Bed bugs are not known to transmit disease. Their bites are painless and typically happen at night while you sleep. Bed bugs feed for about three to 10 minutes before crawling off to a sheltered crevice. They will bite anywhere on the body, but especially on exposed areas such as the face, neck, arms and hands.

Some people are hardly aware they have been bitten, but others suffer an allergic reaction and may develop painful swellings similar to those associated with mosquito or flea bites. The bites may itch for up to two weeks before healing, so resist the urge to scratch to prevent a secondary, bacterial infection. Wash the bites with soap and water to reduce the risk of infection.

How can I prevent a bed bug infestation in my home?
Do not bring infested items into your home. It is important to inspect new and used furniture before bringing it inside by examining tight spaces along seams, around buttons and under cushions. When traveling, look for evidence of bed bugs, such as fecal spots on mattresses, before unpacking.
I think my home has bed bugs, but how can I be sure?
Unless an infestation is severe, you may not see bed bugs crawling out in the open. They prefer to hide in sheltered areas until they come out to feed, but you can find evidence of bed bugs. Check pillowcases, sheets, box springs and mattresses for their feces which looks like dark spots—as if someone touched a dark magic marker to the fabric. Examine the room thoroughly, especially the wall, baseboard, headboard and furniture near the bed. Use a flashlight to look behind and underneath furniture and woodwork.

How do I get rid of bed bugs?
There is no magic bullet to use against bed bugs. Once you have identified a bed bug infestation, you will probably require the help of a professional pest control specialist. But a professional can’t do it alone. To get rid of bed bugs, you must remove clutter such as pictures, books and clothing from the infested area so there are fewer places for the bugs to hide. Vacuuming will remove some of the bed bugs, but the eggs are glued in place and can’t be removed by vacuuming. When vacuuming, concentrate on mattress seams and around any tufts or buttons. Vacuum wherever your inspection revealed the presence of bed bugs—furniture, box springs, bed frames, floors and baseboards. Remove the vacuum bag immediately; place it in a sealed plastic bag and dispose of it outdoors.

Infested items such as clothing, shoes, bedding and blankets can be placed in a clothes dryer on high heat for 20 minutes to kill bed bugs and their eggs. Mattresses and box springs may be enclosed in bed bug-proof zippered cover to kill the bugs inside. The cover should remain in place for more than one year because bed bugs can survive a long time without feeding.

What about using pesticides?
Infestations will usually require the use of pesticides in conjunction with the cleaning and vacuuming methods listed above. Chemicals are most safely applied by a licensed professional. Professionals have access to the insecticides most effective against bed bugs and are trained in their proper application. However, if you plan to use pesticides yourself, be sure to use products labeled for indoor use, apply only to areas listed on the label and always follow label instructions. Improper application of chemicals is dangerous and may even make the problem worse. For example, bug bombs are not effective and may scatter bed bugs to other rooms or neighboring apartments. Repellents such as DEET do not work against bed bugs.

Who do I contact to have a bug identified?
If you find a bug and would like to have it identified, the Ohio Department of Health’s Zoonotic Disease Program (ZDP) offers a free insect identification service.

You may contact ZDP at: 614-752-1029 and press [option 1] for submission information.
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become a problem at one time or another in the hospital,” Tucker says. “They need to know that anyone that works in the hospital can bring bedbugs from home in their purse, in their personal belongings, even on their clothing, and bring them into the facility.”

The policy should include warning signs of bedbugs in the hospital, training requirements for frontline staff and environmental services, and protocol for treatment of the room or area (e.g., a HEPA-filtered vacuum to clean furniture, and appropriate, Environment Protection Agency-approved pesticides in cracks and crevices).

Other considerations include closing off a patient’s room, dealing with personal belongings, scheduling appropriate times for pest management, and the possibility for multiple treatments.

Many hospitals use an outside pest management contractor or entomologist to develop their policy, says Tucker.

“Get your contractor in right now and have a meeting and say, ‘Okay, as far as we know we don’t have any bedbugs, but I want a plan from you as to what you’re going to do if I call you, because I want to be ahead of the curve on this,’ ” he says. “[Establish a] contact person, someone who has additional bedbug training, and make sure your contractor is up to speed and knows immediately what they need to do.”

Training staff and taking the appropriate steps

Environmental staff members, along with frontline staff members, the IP, and the IC team, should be able to identify warning signs of bedbugs. The earlier you catch an infestation, whether it’s in a patient room or a common area, the easier it will be to quickly contain it. The Ohio Department of Health has made it a goal to better educate hospitals and the general public to recognize bedbugs in any environment, says Jennifer House, public information officer for the Ohio Department of Health in Columbus. “I think the first part is just letting [staff] know what [bedbugs] look like because there are so many bugs, and I think a lot of times people don’t realize that if there is something that looks like an apple seed, it could actually be a bedbug,” House says.

If you discover an infestation, your first course of action should be to get a contractor or exterminator to the facility as soon as possible to begin decontamination procedures, says Paul Wenning, chair of the Central Ohio Bed Bug Task Force, an independent volunteer group that offers resources and best practices for identifying and exterminating bedbugs. “Because of the nature of the hospital setting, it’s a lot easier to control the bedbugs than it would be in any other facility,” Wenning says.