

Bed Bugs Parent Information

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Recently, there have been articles in the newspaper and information on TV regarding bedbug activity in the state of Indiana as well as in our local communities. This information is for you to further educate yourselves about bed bug activity, especially if you will be traveling over Spring Break.

What are bedbugs?

Bed bugs, *Cimex lectularius*, are reddish-brown, oval-shaped, flattened insects that are about 1/4 inch long. Nymphs (immature bed bugs) resemble the adult bugs but are often smaller and lighter in color. Bed bugs usually feed on the blood of humans during the night-time hours and crawl away to hide in nearby cracks, crevices and recesses of furniture (especially mattresses) and walls of the home during the day. Most people experience itching, pain and/or swelling of the skin where a bed bug bite occurs (such as the arms, face or back), within one day of a bite. Although the bites can cause considerable discomfort and loss of sleep, bed bugs do not transmit disease, even after feeding on multiple hosts.

How are bedbugs spread?

Bedbugs are spread through infested furniture or by hiding in items used during travel, such as suitcases, clothing, and other belongings. Once established, bugs can then move throughout a building by crawling or transport on humans.

Who is at risk for bedbugs?

Bed bugs are commonly found in large buildings such as apartments, dormitories, prisons, hospitals, and hotels; however, infestations can also occur in private residences. Bed bugs are sometimes thought to occur only in poor and unsanitary conditions. This is not the case. Bed bugs can be found even in very clean environments.

How are bedbugs identified?

Bed bug infestations can be seen by the presence of actual bugs, their light-brown skins (shed during growth into adulthood), dark spots of fecal material, and blood spots on bedding, upholstered furniture, or walls. When looking for evidence of bed bugs, use a flashlight and be sure to carefully and systematically check the following areas:

- Along mattress seams
- Under the gauze covering of box springs (where fabric is stapled to the wooden frame)
- Behind wall- mounted objects and bed headboards
- Inside cracks and crevices of upholstered and wooden furniture (and underneath furniture)
- Cracks in wood molding
- Under the edges of wall- to- wall carpeting
- Under loose wall paper
- Among clutter stored in closets

Remember that other bugs look like bed bugs which bite humans and produce similar bite-like reactions. Before treating an infestation, it is very important to correctly identify the bug. Ask for professional help to properly identify the bugs. You may contact the Indiana State Department of Health Entomology Lab (317-351-7190), or the Purdue University Plant and Pest Diagnostic Laboratory (765-794-7071) or visit the Purdue University website at: <http://www.ppdل.purdue.edu/ppdl/samples.html> for further information on submission of bugs for identification.

What treatment is recommended for bed bug bites?

Treatment of the bed bug bites consists of treating the itching and inflammation associated with the bites. Drugs called antihistamines and/or corticosteroids may be prescribed to reduce allergic reactions. Antimicrobial ointment may prevent secondary infection.

How are bedbug infestations controlled?

Removal of a bed bug infestation is difficult and should be performed with the help of a professional pest control company that has an understanding of approved insecticides and the proper equipment. Professional pest control companies will examine a residence and make recommendations, such as removing excess clutter and moving furniture away from the walls. Multiple insecticide treatments of the area may be needed, and it is very important to also treat adjoining rooms and apartments (sometimes and the entire building) for bed bugs. Currently used insecticides include inorganic dusts, cyfluthrin, bendiocarb, propoxur and permethrin.

Items that cannot safely be treated with insecticides, such as bedding and clothing, will need to be bagged (to prevent the spread of bed bugs) and then immediately laundered in very hot, soapy water and placed in the dryer on high heat. Toys, backpacks, and other items that cannot be washed should be placed in the dryer for at least 10 minutes on high heat. All bags used to vacuum an infested area should be sealed in a plastic bag prior to disposal. A professional pest control operator may recommend the disposal of beds, mattresses and upholstered furniture that appear to be infested. When items are discarded, it is important to bag or wrap them so that bugs are not dislodged on the way to the dumpster and to break them down to prevent them from being taken and used by others.

How are bedbug infestations prevented?

Insect repellents are not effective against bed bugs. The best ways to prevent infestation includes extra caution when acquiring used furniture, especially mattresses and couches, and avoid taking curbside items. When staying in hotels, it is important to check the beds for signs of bed bug infestations and to keep luggage and other personal items on luggage racks away from upholstered surfaces and walls. It is also beneficial not to unpack luggage into drawers in hotels. If you suspect an infestation, be sure to report it to hotel management. It is also recommended to place clothing in disposable plastic bags before unpacking and immediately launder it upon returning home. Luggage may be treated or discarded if exposed to an infestation.

For additional information on bedbugs:

Purdue University Publications:

<http://www.extension.entm.purdue.edu/publications/E-249.pdf>

<http://www.extension.entm.purdue.edu/publications/E-260.pdf>

If you should have any further questions or if I can be of assistance, please contact Maureen VerVaet, RN, at mvervaet@diocesefwsb.org or on my mobile phone 574-904-0233.

Sincerely,

Maureen VerVaet, RN, BSN

School Wellness Ministry

Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend

The School Wellness Ministry of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend is sponsored through the Saint Joseph Regional Medical Center.