

Bed Bugs in Health Care Facilities

Health care facilities experience a constant inflow of people and their belongings, and can expect bed bugs to be introduced from time to time. Hospitals, hospices, elder care facilities and group homes house sleeping people. It is this characteristic that makes them places where bed bug populations can, if left unchecked, grow, spread and impact staff, visitors and patients.

GUIDELINES

- Confirming a bed bug infestation is the first step toward controlling them. When bed bugs are suspected, specimens should be collected and submitted to entomologists or pest management professionals qualified to identify them. Caregivers, launderers, maintenance staff and others should be trained to recognize and report bed bugs and their signs.
- Without specimens identified as bed bugs, a report of suspected bites does not necessarily mean a facility is bed bug infested. While skin markings may be consistent with bed bug bites (often circular, inflamed and somewhat linear in arrangement), other biting arthropods and environmental and medical conditions can produce similar markings. Visible reactions may not appear for two weeks after the bites. Many people show no skin markings at all, and the elderly and immune-compromised are known to experience lesser reactions to bites.
- When bed bugs are suspected or confirmed, immediately and directly notify a designated authority for the facility. Reports passed “up the chain” may not get to a person with the authority to act, and the longer an infestation goes unchecked, the more costly it may become. An experienced pest management professional should inspect and treat as needed all areas where bed bugs are suspected, as well as all rooms adjacent, above and below.
- When bed bugs are discovered in a patient room, if possible the patient(s) should be bathed or showered, clothes changed, and transferred to another room. Patient belongings, equipment and furnishings including beds, should not leave the room until thorough inspection finds them bed bug free. Bedclothes should be carefully removed, tightly sealed in bags, put directly into a washer or dryer and dried on the hot setting for at least 20 minutes to kill all stages of bed bugs. If bed bugs are confirmed in personal belongings, the owner should be advised that their household may be infested.
- Seal potential bed bug access points to adjacent rooms, by filling gaps that occur where plumbing penetrates common walls and around electrical, cable and phone outlets.
- Waiting rooms, visitor lounges, common areas, laundry rooms, and equipment such as wheelchairs and food carts, should be regularly inspected for bed bugs.
- Traps such as those that emit carbon dioxide, may be used to monitor bed bug populations.



Adult bed bug feeding

Photo: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention