

Post Holiday Travel Bed Bug Infestations

by Patricia Byrne

If you traveled during the holidays or had visitors from out of town, be on alert for bed bugs. They have dropped out of the news lately, but the problem has not gone away. When I was traveling this Christmas I spoke with friends who had family in the North East who were having a difficult time with a bed bug infestation. With the mobile population we have in this country it is impossible for the Bed bug problem to stay isolated. They have traveled to all sections of our country.

Bed bugs are small reddish brownish, oval flattened insects that feed solely on the blood of animals. The adult bugs are about 3/16-inch long. The immature nymphs are smaller and lighter in color. These bugs do not fly but travel very fast over floors, walls and other surfaces. The female bugs lay their eggs in secluded areas at a rate of 1, 2 or more eggs per day. The eggs are tiny and whitish which makes them hard to see on most surfaces without magnification. When first laid, the eggs are sticky allowing them to adhere to surfaces. The newly hatched nymphs are no bigger than a pinhead. As they grow, they molt five times before reaching maturity. A blood meal is required between each molt. In temperatures between 70-80 degrees F the bugs can mature in as little as a month producing three or more generations per year. These bugs are more active at night and during the day they prefer to hide near where people sleep and other places where they sit at night. Their flat bodies make it easy for them to fit into the seams of mattresses, box springs, headboards, sofas, chairs and other crevices. These areas are usually marked by dark spotting and staining that is dried excrement of the bugs. Other signs are eggs, egg shells, the brownish molted skins of the maturing nymphs and the bugs themselves. Another less often sign is rusty or reddish blood smears on bed sheets and mattresses from the engorged bed bugs being crushed. The bite of a bed bug is experienced differently by different people. Some have no reaction or mistake the bites for flea bites from their pets. This allows the infestation to go undetected until the entire residence is affected. Some have a blistering effect around the bites that are very painful and usually find out they are bed bug bites when they are seen by a physician. (1)

Where do they come from? These bugs are efficient hitchhikers. They are often transported in luggage, on clothing, beds, furniture, and other items that have been in contact with them. Inspect beds in hotels you stay in when traveling. Place your luggage on the luggage rack provided not on the bed. If you purchase used furniture inspect it carefully and treat it with Crawling Insect Insecticides (a Diatomaceous Earth product) before bringing it into your home. Even your luggage could pick up the bugs while in the cargo section of the plane. I personally dust my luggage with Crawling Insect Insecticide before traveling. Be careful where you place your clothes in hotel rooms. Place clothing you wear in a plastic bag before putting them back in your luggage. Dust the trunk of your car before you travel or before you pick up someone at the airport. Dust your entire interior if you see a bed bug anywhere in your home. It was transported to the home in your car from luggage after a trip.

Clearing a home of bed bugs is not like treating for head lice. It is much more involved. No matter what you use to treat an infestation or if you use a pest control company it is important to treat all infested areas and those that may not show signs yet. **Crawling Insect Insecticide made of Diatomaceous Earth is both EPA approved to treat bed bugs. Those who have used them and applied it correctly have been**

successful in clearing their homes of Bed Bugs. *The key to their use is to deliver the dust evenly assuring complete coverage.* I have spoken to many people who live in the North East that paid thousands to pest control companies and still had the bugs. People were leaving their homes or throwing out their furniture and clothing. This is all costly and will not rid the home of bed bugs. Even when a property is left empty for a year or more the bed bugs can survive. Diatomaceous Earth insecticides can be effectively delivered as a dust that will go into the seams and crevices where the bugs are. You can use *Spritzer* and *Pest Pistol* **dusters** sold by Perma-Guard, Inc. distributed by TX distributors and other good dusters sold by Soil Mender Products for the specific purpose of delivering a light even coverage that is required when fighting a bed bug infestation. ***It must be dusted literally everywhere.*** Beds must be taken apart to assure coverage of the frames, mattresses, and box springs. Sofas and other furniture must be dusted under and between cushions and under the bottom, the sides, and the back. Closets, dressers, luggage and clothing can be dusted. Clothing that is taken to the cleaners or laundered should not be brought back into the house until the home a week after the home has been treated. When I say you must be thorough, I mean you must dust everywhere. Carpets, hardwood or tile floors, book cases, all furniture whether it is fabric, leather, or plastic. When you use a duster it will create a cloud that hangs in the air for a few hours. This type of DE product is amorphous silica and not crystalline, it is still irritating to the eyes and lungs. It does not carry the same danger as the DE with a high crystalline content that is used in pool filtration but is still an irritant at that concentration in a closed area. Therefore wear a mask, take contacts out if you wear them while dusting and leave the house for about 4hours to allow the dust to settle. Once it has settled it is safe to return without the mask. If your eyes are irritated just rinse with water. The irritation will clear on its own.

Do not vacuum the floors for a week or two. It isn't that visible and does not kick back up into the air if you applied it in a light layer as directed. The longer you are willing to live with things looking a little dusty the more likely you will kill the adults and recently hatched bugs before they can lay eggs. Leave the DE insecticide on the mattress and box springs for good. If you put a mattress cover over it there is no issue with breathing it. It will not come through. Even without a cover the DE does not release into the air from the mattress material. I dusted my own mattress and box spring as a preventative measure since I travel for work. Sweeping tile or hardwood floors may be a little dusty, but no more than the dirt brought in by shoes from outdoors.

Although bed bugs prefer feeding on humans they will also bite other warm blooded animals like your pets. So it is important not to forget to protect them. Dust their bed areas inside and outside dog houses. Diatomaceous Earth products are effective, inexpensive, can reach into every crevice a bug can hide and the bugs cannot become immune.

1. UK cooperative Extension Service_ University of Kentucky-College of Agriculture entfact-636 By Michael Potter, Professor and Urban Entomologist.