



Bed Bugs: Protect Your Family This Summer

Supervisor Wilma Chan



Summer is here and with it brings bugs. Bed bug infestations are a serious health issue and can cause problems for your family. It is important to educate yourself about bed bugs in order to avoid the harmful effects of an infestation.

Bed bugs are a disgusting irritation for families and their population has risen dramatically in Alameda County over the past decade. We need to protect our communities from this health hazard. There are no confirmed cases of diseases being spread by bed bugs compared to mosquitoes, ticks, or other blood consuming insects. However, bed bugs can be extremely harmful to your children, parents, or yourself if you are allergic to the saliva and bite of bed bugs. In these cases, you may experience anaphylaxis—an allergic reaction similar to bee stings in people who are allergic.

Bed bugs are a major problem in cities like New York, but here in Alameda County, we are working to combat this problem before it gets worse. In response to this growing problem, Alameda County Vector Control Services District (ACVCSD) has become a crucial resource in the fight against bed bugs. You may have seen some of their new ads about the health hazards of bed bug infestations, but did you know that they also have resources and educational programs available for anyone interested in combating this growing problem?

ACVCSD has been working hard to educate Alameda County staff about the growing bed bug problem in our county. Their mission is to prevent the spread of disease, injury, and discomfort to our county residents by controlling insects, rodents, and other pests and eliminating some of the environmental causes of infestations. Over the last decade, the ACVCSD has seen an increase in requests for their services—particularly for their bed bug services.

If you think you might have bed bugs in your home, here are a few tips to help identify an infestation:

- Bed bugs feed while the human host is sleeping. Their presence is often indicated by the appearance of small blood spots on light colored sleep wear and linen. When disturbed, they emit a disagreeable musky odor.
- Bed bugs are easily transported through clothing, mattresses, furniture and other fabrics and can cause an infestation in any habitat. Contrary to beliefs, bed bug presence is not determined by sanitation or maintenance.
- In addition to the allergic reaction, there is also the possibility of secondary infection suddenly appearing in association with excessive scratching that introduces bacteria, etc. into the bite.

Bed bugs can be a serious health risk because, for many people, they aren't even aware of the infestation. Once you discover a bed bug infestation, it is important to take the necessary precautions and follow a course of treatment. You should use a residual pesticide to treat cracks and crevices. A re-treatment after 10-14 days is recommended as eggs are resistant to pesticides. Pesticide treatments include alcohol in a spray bottle, soapy water solution, or a disinfectant (like Lysol) followed by a thorough vacuuming and/or steam cleaning areas where pesticides would be used - after treatment.



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Some tips for bed bug prevention while travelling are:

- Pull back bedding at the head of the bed to look for bed bugs or stains on the mattress (usually several black spots in a group).
- Check the underside of the mattress tag and the seams of the mattress and the box springs.
- If possible remove the head board from the wall and inspect the back of it, particularly the holes for set-in screws and the plate that allows the head board to hang from the wall.
- If bed bug evidence is found, report it to the management and ask for another room.
- Do not place your suitcase on the bed.
- Inspect the luggage stand (where the straps are attached to the metal bars) and place your bag on the floor and away from the wall.
- Keep your clothing in your bag, do not unpack and place your belongings in drawers.
- Check the closet for bed bug evidence before hanging clothes.
- Place your shoes in an open area, not under the bed or in the closet.
- Upon returning home, unpack your luggage immediately in some location other than the bed room (bathroom, garage, foyer etc.). Launder all clothing.
- Use a flashlight; inspect your bag for bed bugs.
- If you have reason to believe that your bag did encounter bed bugs, place your suitcase in a plastic bag. If the weather is warm, the bag with the suitcase can be put out in the hot sun or in the hot car for a day.

Some tips for bed bug prevention when decorating your home or moving are:

- Never take any furniture from a dumpster.
- Do not purchase refurbished mattresses or couches.
- Do not purchase furniture at a garage sale or antique store without carefully inspecting it first.
- Never rent furniture or store anyone's furniture in your own home.
- Do not purchase used books without first inspecting them.
- If you are helping a friend move, or transporting other people's belongings for any reason, be sure to inspect your vehicle once the belongings have been removed.

Some tips for bed bug prevention when doing laundry at a laundromat are:

- Do not transport laundry in cloth bags unless you plan to wash and dry them. Instead use white, plastic baskets that are easy to inspect when they are empty.
- Do not set your laundry basket on the floor or on top of the washer.
- Do not set your laundry basket anywhere near the seating areas or trash cans.
- Inspect any chairs in the seating area of the laundromat before sitting on them.
- Inspect the table used for folding laundry before placing your clean clothes on it. Better still; fold your clean clothes at home.

On behalf of the Alameda County Board of Supervisors, I can tell you that we are committed to a healthy Alameda County. To help mitigate the impact of the growing bed bug problem, ACVCSD is holding a training session for Alameda County staff, which will be the first of several sessions to bring about awareness to the public about this growing problem. For more information about bed bugs, visit the Alameda County Vector Control website: http://www.acvcSD.org/bed_bugs.pdf.