



How to Check Your Hotel Room for Bed Bugs

Still a rare occurrence in our layover hotels, *Cimex lectularius*, commonly known as bed bugs, are making a comeback and can be encountered in our crew hotels, even 5-star luxury ones. This is partly due to changes in modern pest control practice, immigration, and international travel. DDT, which was used to eradicate the bugs after World War II, is prohibited today and less effective pesticides are often utilized.

In light of these findings, your AFA-MEC Hotel Committee inspection process was modified to ask the question; "Has your hotel had a recent infestation of bed bugs? And if yes, please describe and/or document the treatment used to contain and eradicate them from the property."

So, what are bed bugs and how serious a threat are they? Bed bugs are oval, small (1/5"-1/4"), wingless, brownish, flattened insects that feed solely on the blood of animals. Although bed bugs can harbor pathogens in their bodies, transmission to humans is highly unlikely. For this reason, they are not considered a serious disease threat. Symptoms of bites vary with the individual, but many people develop itchy red welts or localized swelling and inflammation. Bed bugs are nocturnal and feed on any bare skin exposed while sleeping, so they prefer to hide close to where people sleep. It's important to note that not all bites or bite-like reactions are due to bed bugs.

Bed bugs are easy to see with the naked eye, but difficult to find in their resting places. Due to their flat bodies they can hide almost anywhere, but they are most commonly found in beds; under folds in mattresses, along seams in between bedposts and bed slats, behind headboards, in linen tufts, in bed frames and box springs. But they have been known to hibernate in other tiny crevices; including upholstered furniture, light fixtures, under carpet edges, telephones, nightstands and even on housekeeping carts.

You might want to check the room and bed for telltale signs of bed bugs before retiring. Aside from not wanting to be bitten, you do not want to transfer them to your home or to the aircraft. First, after entering your hotel room elevate suitcases or totes, keeping them off the floor. Use the luggage stand. Do not place your suitcase or tote on the bed.

Here are a few spot check tips for concerned travelers:

1. Examine and peel back the bed cover and sheets. Check for rusty or reddish spots of blood on bed sheets, mattresses or walls, most often in groups of two or more. Check the mattress, running your fingers along the upper and lower seams. Make sure to check the mattress tag, bed bugs often hide there. A favorite spot for bed bugs to hide is under folds in mattresses, along seams in between bedposts and bed slats and or in the seams of box springs and mattresses.



2. Look for the bugs, themselves. Check for tiny black spots (excrement) that are smaller than poppy seeds. You may also see translucent light brown skins or, in the case of an infestation - live bugs.
3. Check the bedside table. Look for signs of bed bugs in the drawers and along the wall on the side of the bed that is less likely to be disturbed by cleaning staff and guests. If you see powder in the drawers or on the headboard, it is likely that the room has already been treated for bed bugs by an exterminator.
4. If bed bugs are detected, you should request another room and inform hotel management. Just moving to a different room may not be the total answer. You should repeat the thorough inspection of any new or different room you are offered. If conditions persist, contact the Hotel Desk for intervention.

When you pack to leave, inspect your luggage carefully first and inspect every item as you pack to help detect any bugs or their signs. Laundering most cloth items with typical hot water (120 degrees F) and detergent followed by drying on low heat for at least 20 minutes (or standard dry cleaning) should kill all bed bugs in or on such items. Sealing freshly-laundered items inside a plastic bag should help keep any more bed bugs from getting in those items later to hide (and be carried back with you). Although bed bug incidents in the US are increasing, they remain rare in comparison to most other household pests. Familiarity can help avoid infestation, or at least prompt earlier intervention by a professional.

This article was written based on a report from the University of Kentucky and Ecolab, Inc.

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