

Preventing and Managing Bed Bug Infestations in Shelters and Group Living Environments

The appearance of bed bugs in shelters and transitional living environments is becoming increasingly problematic. The homeless population is particularly vulnerable to bed bugs due to potential exposure to bed bug infestations in emergency shelters, transitional housing, motels and hotels, homes of friends, etc. Outlined below are key considerations for shelter staff and others to consider when preventing, or being faced with a bed bug infestation:

Prevention

Screening: Homeless shelters and other transitional housing facilities should incorporate bed bug screening into intake and assessment procedures, as clients may bring bed bugs from their previous living arrangements. Exposure to bed bugs can be incorporated into medical questions related to other public health pests such as lice, fleas, scabies and presence of cockroach allergies or asthma. Questions should be phrased with sensitivity, as this may be the first educational experience a person has about bed bugs.

Suggestions include:

- “Have you stayed in a place where you think you may have been exposed to bed bugs in the past three months?”
- “Has anyone in your family been bitten by bed bugs or do they have bites or blisters that you’re concerned about?”
- “Bed bugs, lice, scabies and fleas can cause medical concerns. Do you need help with a bed bug, or any other pest issues?”

Handling Complaints

Bed bugs though are not known to transmit diseases to humans, nevertheless sometimes elicit fear and panic in people. Most are unwilling to live or work with pests, especially those that bite. Complaints about bed bugs must be handle IMMEDIATELY and with concern, but also with a logical approach that relies on science and pest control expertise. The typical course of events would be complaint, inspection, confirmation, cleaning, treatment, future prevention, and follow up to be sure the problem was handled adequately.

Furniture and Room Guidelines

Bed bugs thrive under certain conditions which are enhanced by the availability of hiding spots close to human hosts. Bed bugs have a strong preference for paper and wood, over metal and plastic. Porous surfaces provide more humidity and egg-laying locations. Furniture choices can greatly contribute to the control of bed bugs.