

Daily Union Article

Saturday, May 6, 2017

Title: Bugs in Rugs and More

Sometimes the craziest things can complicate our lives. I was recently visiting with a health care professional who expressed that Geary County has a small, but very inconvenient pest that seems to be hitchhiking from place to place. The common bed bug is on the move in our community.

Although it's not the most pleasant thing to read about, it's important that you know what you can do to prevent this insect from getting a stronger foothold in our communities. Awareness is a great protection against inadvertently passing them on from a public place to your own home.

The common bed bug (*Cimex lectularius*) has been around a long time. It feeds on blood and causes itchy bites that irritate the skin of human hosts. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) all consider bed bugs to be a public health pest. Fortunately, unlike most public health pests, bed bugs have not been found to pass or spread disease.

The recent increase in bed bugs in the United States has been attributed to four factors:

- 1) Increase travel
- 2) Lack of knowledge on how to prevent infestations
- 3) Increased resistance of bed bugs to pesticides
- 4) Ineffective pest control practices.

As a traveling consumer, it is important for you to know how to look for bed bugs both at home and in lodging facilities. Realizing that low-level infestations are much more difficult to find and correct, early detection is far less costly and easier to tackle than a more significant outbreak.

Physical signs of bed bugs include:

- Rusty or reddish stains on bed sheets or mattresses. These are caused by bed bugs being crushed.
- Dark spots about the size of the top of a stick pin. This indicates bed bug excrement and may bleed on fabric similar to how a marker would.
- Eggs and eggshells. Although tiny and a pale yellow, this indicates that nymphs are present and have shed their skin as they are growing larger.
- Live bed bugs. (see picture inset)

Bed bugs are typically out in the open. They hide in a variety of places including around the bed. They tuck themselves into the edge of mattresses or pillows along the piping, seams, and tags and along the box spring edges in the same types of locations. If a room is heavily infested, you may also find them in the seams of chairs and couches, between cushions, and in the folds of curtains. They don't hide exclusively in fabric, though. They could be in drawer joints, electrical receptacles and appliances, as well as under loose wall paper and wall hangings. Any crack or crevice will be a potential hiding place.

To reduce the risk of bringing bed bugs into your own home, make sure you check secondhand furniture, beds, and couches for signs of infestation *before* you bring them home.

Use a protective cover that encases mattresses and box springs and eliminates hiding spots for these pests. Using a light colored casement makes it easier to spot bed bugs. Don't be stingy when it comes to purchase these protective coverings. A torn encasement or one with holes provides an ideal place for bed bugs to take over.

Keep your home free of clutter where bed bugs might like to reside. Vacuuming regularly is another way to remove these insects from the darker crevasses of your carpet or floor.

If you are traveling, you should take precautions to ensure you don't accidentally pick up any of these hitchhikers from an infested area. The top three places where bed bugs are found, according to a survey of pest control professionals, include 1) apartments/condominiums (95%), single-family homes (93%), and hotels/motels (75%).

It is safe to say that when you travel, you will stay in a commercial lodging facility, a privately owned rental, or the house of a friend or loved one. Being aware and cautious about your environment's condition is key. The EPA offers these tips for travelers:

- ✓ Check any room where you will be staying for the presence of bed bugs. You generally can do this without extra tools but a flashlight might be useful. Especially check the mattress and headboard areas before sleeping. Also inspect the luggage racks.
- ✓ In hotel rooms, use luggage racks for holding your luggage when you are packing or unpacking rather than placing this on the bed for this purpose. Try to keep your luggage away from the bed.
- ✓ Store suitcases away from your bedroom, such as in the basement or garage. Never store suitcases under your bed.

Geary County isn't the only place that has been experiencing a rise in bed bug issues. It is a nation-wide problem. The National Pest Management Association reports that

nearly all (99.6%) pest professionals treated bed bugs in 2015. Although this isn't higher than the results of their 2013 survey, it is significantly higher than it was 5, 10, and 15 years before!

If you want to know more about bed bug problems and solutions, the EPA has an extensive library of resources you can access to help at <https://www.epa.gov/bedbugs>.

For more information about keeping your home healthy and free of yucky household pests, contact the Geary County K-State Research and Extension office at 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!



Photo credit: CDC/ CDC-DPDx; Blaine Mathison - This image depicts a view from above of an adult, *Cimex lectularius* bed bug. Adult bed bugs are on average 5 mm long and have an oval-shaped and flattened body.