



## McCord Web Services LLC

2254 Ravenna Court • Waldorf, MD 20603 • Voice: 301.705.7303 • Fax: 301.705.7618

Written for a pest control firm.

### What to Do if Bed Bugs Come Visiting for the Holidays

Hollywood doesn't need a blockbuster horror show to frighten holiday crowds; bed bugs already have America in a panic! Nationwide hysteria over *Cimex lectularius*, the common bed bug, has created an atmosphere of paranoia that is affecting the usually festive mood of the upcoming holidays. Fear that holiday guests might bring bed bugs into their home has strained the hospitality of many usually affable hosts, placing additional stress on family gatherings. Fear of picking up these tiny, blood-sucking parasites from an infected hotel room and carrying them home has caused many people in New Jersey and across America to cancel holiday travel plans and forego long-anticipated visits with relatives.

In the [October 18, 2010 issue of Time magazine](#), humor columnist Joel Stein poked fun at the bed bug paranoia sweeping the country. Expecting holiday guests who will stay in several hotels during their cross-country trek from New York City, ground zero for America's bed bug explosion, Stein said his wife Cassandra "has been trying to find a way to trick my father and his wife . . . into being hosed down with boiling water before entering our home."

Laughing about our fears may keep us from being overwhelmed by hysteria, but an invasion of bed bugs is no laughing matter. Once common bedfellows, bed bugs were effectively annihilated in the U.S. after World War II with powerful pesticides like DDT. The banning of DDT in the 1970s, coupled with increased international airline travel, allowed these noxious pests to creep back into the country. From international gateways, most notably New York City, bed bugs started spreading across America and are now found in all 50 states.

Fifteen years ago most U.S. entomologists had never seen a live bed bug. Ten years ago, only a handful of pest control companies had ever received a bed bug complaint. Five years ago about one-third of pest control professionals had encountered a bed bug infestation. Today, more than 95% of pest control firms in New Jersey and across America are regularly called to exterminate bed bugs, according to a national survey conducted by University of Kentucky entomologist Michael Potter, a prominent bed bug expert.

Slightly smaller than an apple seed when full grown, bed bugs hatch from pinpoint-sized eggs, taking just one month to progress through five larval stages into flat-bodied, brownish-red, 1/4-inch adults. Bed bugs begin to feed immediately after hatching and must consume a blood meal before each molt and in order to reproduce. Drawn by human body heat and exhaled carbon dioxide, bed bugs crawl out of their hiding places during the night, creeping into beds to feed on human blood while their victims sleep. To ensure that their victims remain motionless during their five- to 10-minute feeding period, bed bugs inject their victims with an anesthetic as they pierce the skin.

In the early stages of infestation, victims may not even realize they have a bed bug problem. Only 50% of people react to bed bug bites which are often mistaken for mosquito or spider bites. If new bites occur several mornings in a row or occur in tight groupings or rows of three, bed bugs are the likely culprit. Although bed bugs are not known to transmit disease, their bites can cause serious allergic reactions and problematic skin infections from repetitive scratching. Even though bed bugs pose a minimal risk to physical health, the psychological horror these pests provoke can leave victims feeling nervous, anxious and jumpy long after they're gone.

"They're creepy. They're invading your sanctuary, your bed, and suddenly you can't sleep because they're coming out of your walls, out of your box springs, to feed on you in the night," entomologist Jeffrey White, star of the Internet series *Bed Bug TV*, said in the October 4 2010, issue of *Time*. "I've seen people fall apart emotionally because of an infestation."

Equal opportunity pests, bed bugs are attracted solely by human blood, not refuse or poor housecleaning. You're as likely to encounter bed bugs at an expensive luxury hotel as at a cheap interstate motel. New York's famed Waldorf-Astoria, which caters to the world's wealthy elite, has been sued twice in recent months by guests claiming to have been bitten by bed bugs during their stay. It is becoming nearly impossible to avoid bed bugs. A growing problem for the past few years in hotels, apartment buildings and college dormitories, bed bugs have begun cropping up in office buildings, retail stores, movie theaters, schools, hospitals, subways, trains, airline baggage compartments and single-family homes. To contract bed bugs, you need only sit in a cab or stay in a hotel room recently vacated by an infected person.

The fact that bed bugs ride into homes on the clothing, luggage or possessions of their victims – or their guests -- only inflames bed bug paranoia. Adept hitchhikers, bed bugs hide in the seams, folds and corners of clothing, suitcases, purses, briefcases, backpacks and storage boxes. If bed bugs invade your office, you can bring them home inside the housing of your laptop computer or iPhone. It takes just one pregnant bed bug to infect your home!

Despite increased public education, considerable stigma is still attached to bed bugs. Fear of exposure can lead neighbors, co-workers and classmates to ostracize bed bug victims. This stigma can make it hard to broach the bed bug issue with visiting house guests. Etiquette maven Judith Martin, who dispenses advice as Miss Manners, cautions against embarrassing guests; but it is possible to decrease possible bed bug risk without offending houseguests by taking some pre- and post-visit precautions.

The most effective preventive action you can take is to schedule ChemTec Pest Control's Bed Bug Monitoring Service before guests arrive. An experienced pest control professional will place ClimbUp Interceptor bed bug monitors under the legs of beds, couches and other common bed bug access points. Additional monitoring devices will be placed in likely bed bug hiding places, such as behind headboards, between mattress and box springs and behind bedroom picture frames. Two weeks later, after guests have departed, ChemTec will return to inspect your home. If bed bugs are found, treatment can be scheduled immediately before the infestation grows and spreads throughout your home.

The following additional steps may help to minimize the risk of bed bug infestation when holiday guests visit:

- Install [Protect-A-Bed bed bug-proof encasements](#) on mattress and box springs to protect your bedding investment if bed bugs do invade. Entomologist-approved bed bug-proof encasement products are available from ChemTec Pest Control which offers customers of its bed bug monitoring, preventative or treatment services a 15% discount on all encasement products.
- Position beds away from the wall.
- Tuck in bed sheets and blankets so they don't touch the floor.
- Place low-tech monitoring devices such as the [ClimbUp Interceptor](#) under bed and furniture legs.
- Provide a luggage rack or card table for guests' suitcases.
- If guests unpack their bags, store suitcases away from bedrooms.
- Provide an over-the-door hanger rack to discourage guests from using family closets.
- Remove clutter where bed bugs can hide.

If you have been invited to be the guest at someone's home during the holidays and come into contact with bed bugs prior to your visit, Internet etiquette expert Yvonne Durant recommends being honest with your hosts. In her [September 15, 2010 post on HuffingtonPost.com](#), Durant says, "Find a way to make them [your hosts] feel comfortable by declining the invitation before they have to rescind it. 'I don't think it's a good idea that I visit you at this time. When I'm sure the problem has been solved, I'll let you know and we can reschedule.' Don't make it their problem."

### **Keep Bed Bugs from Hitching a Ride Home with Your College Student**

Over the past two years, bed bug infestations have become a common occurrence in college dormitories and off-campus housing. It's a universal problem on campuses in New Jersey and across the U.S. If your

college student is coming home for the holidays, you'll want to take some extra precautions to make sure he doesn't unpack bed bugs along with his dirty laundry. Because he's family, you can take off the velvet gloves and ask your collegiate to follow more exacting bed bug prevention procedures than you ask of guests.

Ask your collegiate to let you know if bed bugs are reported on campus. Make sure he knows [how to identify bed bugs](#) and where to look for them. Instruct him to place everything he is bringing home in heavy-weight, tightly sealed plastic bags. When he arrives home, don't allow him to carry luggage and possessions into the house. Ask him to unpack in the garage or in a cleared, non-carpeted space in the basement or laundry room. Follow these procedures to minimize the risk of bed bug contamination:

- Carefully inspect each item, including luggage and backpacks, for evidence of bed bugs, paying particular attention to fabric seams and folds.
- Sort laundry into large zip-lock plastic bags and seal tightly until it can be laundered. Leave bags in the garage until you're ready to put laundry in the washing machine.
- If your student's room has been infested with bed bugs, you might want to open iPod and laptop computer cases. Heat given off by electronic devices often attracts bed bugs which are thin enough to slip inside housings and battery compartments.
- Vacuum suitcases thoroughly, brushing seams with a stiff brush to remove any bed bug eggs. Immediately double-wrap vacuum bags in plastic and dispose of in outdoor trash. Run 1/2 cup talcum powder or corn starch through the hose and attachments to suffocate any stray bed bugs.
- Store luggage away from the bedroom.
- If your student has come into direct contact with bed bugs recently, ask him to shower immediately. Ask him to strip in the shower and place his shoes and clothing in a plastic bag for immediate laundering.

Whether you're washing your college student's dirty laundry or linens after a guest's visit, follow these laundry procedures:

- Place items into washer directly from sealed plastic bags. Do not reuse bags and immediately dispose of them to outdoor trash receptacle. Carrying possibly contaminated items through your home can dislodge bed bugs or eggs, exposing another part of your home to infestation.
- Wash clothes in the hottest water possible and dry in the dryer at the hottest setting; at least 120 degrees for a minimum of 30 minutes.
- Immediately store clean laundry in tightly-sealed plastic bags to prevent reinfestation.
- Dry cleanable clothing should be sealed in plastic bags and taken to the cleaners. Be sure to mention that the items may have been exposed to bed bugs so the laundry can take appropriate precautions.
- Possessions that cannot be laundered can be sealed in plastic bags and either frozen at 20 to 30 degrees Fahrenheit for two weeks or exposed to 120-degree heat for two hours.

After holiday guests leave or your college student returns to campus, you may want to have a licensed pest control professional with bed bug expertise inspect your home. This service is included in ChemTec's Bed Bug Monitoring Service. You should also be on the lookout for signs of bed bug infestation, including:

- Live bugs or exoskeletons from molting along mattress seams, under drawers, along carpet edges and under sofa and chair cushions.
- Rusty-colored blood smears or black fecal dots on bed sheets, mattresses, the undersides of box springs, behind headboards, along baseboards and around heating vents.
- Mosquito-like bed bug bites, particularly when new bites are evident each morning.

Even if evidence of a bed bug infestation has not yet developed, proactive New Jersey homeowners may want to take advantage of ChemTec's One Time Preventative Crack and Crevice Treatment. Hiding bed bugs like to crowd together in narrow cracks and crevices. Treating the places where bed bugs are most likely to hide can halt bed bug infestations in their early stages, reducing the possible development of a major infestation.

If despite your best precautions, you find evidence of bed bug activity after holiday guests leave, it is important to call a licensed New Jersey pest control firm like ChemTec Pest Control immediately. Early detection and fast action are critical to successful bed bug elimination. Bed bugs multiply rapidly. A single female can lay 500 eggs during her six- to 12-month lifespan. Eggs hatch in four to 12 days, becoming reproductive adults in just one month. Three or more generations of bed bugs can be produced in a year. In two months a single pregnant bed bug can multiply into a major infestation that can number in the tens to hundreds of thousands. Although bed bugs in search of a meal are capable of traveling more than 100 feet in a single night, these insects tend to stay within eight feet of their victim's bed. Professional pest control treatment while bed bugs are still contained in the bedroom can prevent a bed bug infestation from spreading to other parts of your home.

Impervious to all home and garden pesticides available to consumers, bed bugs have a hard cuticle that makes them difficult to kill. Experienced New Jersey pest control professionals use a combination of contact insecticide sprays, insecticidal dusts and insect growth regulators to attack these pests on multiple levels. Because direct contact is necessary to kill bed bugs, it generally takes at least one retreatment and sometimes more to ensure that all newly-hatched and well-hidden bed bugs have been killed.

Bed bugs are, unfortunately, becoming a fact of life in the U.S. While you shouldn't let bed bugs force you into hiding, it's prudent to be proactive and take precautions during the holidays and throughout the year. ChemTec Pest Control's bed bug prevention services, including Bed Bug Monitoring, bed bug-proof mattress and box spring encasements, One-Time Preventative Crack and Crevice Treatment and year-round Bed Bug Control Service, provide New Jersey homeowners with peace of mind. ChemTec makes sure the bed bugs *don't* bite so you and your family can get a good night's sleep.