As bed bugs continue to spread, travelers need to take steps avoid their bite: a NetWellness column

by Susan C. Jones/The Ohio State University

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Bed bugs have become "a horrible problem" in areas across the United States, with many health departments reporting escalating complaints.

Although bed bugs have always been a problem in some regions of the world, single-home residences, apartment complexes, nursing homes, senior living centers, and hotels and motels are now being affected by their growing numbers.

This brings home the fact that anyone can have bed bug problems -- even four-star hotels. Bed bugs aren't associated with filth or poverty. They can hitchhike anywhere.

This week's NetWellness column is authored by Susan C. Jones, an associate professor in the Department of Entomology at The Ohio State University.
There doesn’t seem to be a single reason as to why bed bugs are making such a surge; however, society is becoming increasingly mobile. For this reason, it is important to look at photos of bed bugs and signs of infestations so you know what to look for in your home and when traveling.

Often when traveling or going into an infested unit -- dorms, apartments, hotel rooms or private rooms -- bed bugs will crawl into your purse, backpack or luggage and hitchhike home with you.

And all they want to do is suck your blood.

Bed bugs don’t fly, but they do crawl quickly and cling tightly onto surfaces. So, if you’re traveling or bringing college students home for the summer, do some checking for signs of bed bugs to prevent them from coming home with you.

**Bed bug bites cause severe itching**

Bed bugs aren’t known to spread disease, but their bites, though painless when they occur, can cause severe itching as well as anxiety, sleeplessness and sometimes allergic reactions.

Scratching the bites can also cause infection. However, individuals differ in their sensitivity to bed bug bites, and some people do not develop welts after being bitten.

Follow these guidelines to keep the bed bugs from biting.

- When traveling, check the room for signs of bed bugs before carrying your luggage inside. Look for the bugs themselves — adults are dark and about the size of an apple seed; nymphs are nearly colorless and much smaller; eggs are white and about 1/32 of an inch long. Eggs are glued in place to surfaces. The most obvious signs are spotting and dark stains from the pests’ liquid fecal matter. Check for the bugs and stains on mattresses, box springs, the headboard and elsewhere on the bed frame, bed skirts, furniture, drawers, baseboards and walls, especially in corners and crevices such as the tufts, seams and folds of mattresses.

- If you find signs of bed bugs in a hotel or motel room, insist on getting another room that doesn’t share a common wall, floor or ceiling with the infested room, preferably in a different wing. If that room also indicates an infestation, just leave.

- When returning home after traveling, inspect purses, bags, luggage and other materials for signs for bed bugs. Take luggage and other items immediately to the laundry room instead of the bedroom, just in case you’ve missed anything. Washing clothing in hot water (at least 120 degrees) and drying in a hot dryer for at least 15 minutes kills bugs, nymphs and eggs.

- If you suspect an infestation in your home, immediately contact a pest control company with experience in dealing with bed bugs. Don’t wait, because the problem will just get worse. And don’t use bug bombs. They rarely kill bed bugs but instead cause the bugs to scatter into areas you wouldn’t usually find them, such as your bathroom or kitchen.
• Boric acid also is ineffective. This chemical acts as an insect stomach poison and provides good control for cockroaches, which have chewing mouthparts and thus ingest it into their system. Bed bugs have piercing, sucking mouthparts -- they feed on blood. Hence, boric acid doesn’t kill bed bugs.

• Pest control companies should first be sure to identify the pest as the bed bug and not its lookalike, the bat bug, which typically originates from bats roosting in the attic and isn’t as widespread in living areas as the bed bug.

When bed bugs are confirmed, an integrated pest management approach should be used, employing sanitation, nonchemical measures, and targeted use of chemicals to combat the problem. More than one inspection and treatment is usually required, as a female bed bug can lay 12 eggs a day, and eggs can hatch in six to 17 days. Some insecticides are labeled for use on mattresses.

• Always report bed bugs, although it may be difficult to know where to report such infestations. Start with your local health department, and if that's not the right agency, ask who is responsible.

More resources

To learn more about bed bugs, the extent of the problem, ways to prevent an infestation, and what to do if bed bugs become a problem, visit the links below. You will also find photos of bed bugs and some of their tell-tale signs, brochures, and fact sheets with additional information.

• Bed Bugs: Back with a Vengeance
• Central Ohio Bed Bug Task Force
• OSU Extension Bed Bugs Fact Sheet

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Bed Bug Treatment
Stop Bed Bugs From Invading Your Home. Do-It-Yourself Protection.
www.TallmanScientific.com

Kill Bed Bugs On Contact
www.QBased.com/Bed-Bugs

kill bed bugs
Nontoxic Products For Fast Removal of Bed Bugs! Same Day Shipping.
NaturalGinesis.com

See more in Netwellness
food grade diatomaceous earth is a great way to kill bedbugs without using chemicals. I brought bedbugs back to my house from a hotel in Toledo. It took me a month to rid my house of the little bloodsuckers but I did it without throwing anything out or calling in an expensive exterminator. If I travel I put my clothes in thick garbage bags in the hotel, I never put my luggage on the bed or carpet only on hard surfaces, I double check the bed right down to the mattress, I always use an allersac travel sheet to protect me and I wash my clothes in hot water and put them in the dryer when I return home. Great article Susan