

# How Housekeeping is a Hotel's Front-Line of Defense

Unfortunately, bed bug infestations in New York State are rising at an alarming rate, and hotels are often considered at the epicenter. The housekeeping department serves as both the eyes and ears of a hotel 24/7 and represents the first line of defense against this insidious pest. In order to prevent bed bug incidents, and to stop these incidents from transitioning into infestations, housekeeping departments need to implement an awareness campaign to protect their guests, rooms and against legal liabilities.

### Areas to Inspect Daily

- Housekeeping should spend the majority of their time searching mattresses, box springs and any of the surrounding areas. These areas can include headboards, night stands, lamp shades, or any pictures hanging on the walls.
- Areas should be searched from the bed out, rather than the bed in.
- Bed bugs are very flat and can slip between creases or often inside the stitching, tufting and edges of a mattress. Box springs, especially the wooded support structure within the underside of the dust cover are notorious sites for bed bug harborage. Make sure to inspect the frame of the bed as well.
- As a rule of thumb, if a credit card can fit through the area, a bed bug can fit as well. Classic areas are the space between the headboard and adjoining wall, holes made by picture hooks, and the underside of drawers.

### Tell-Tale Signs of Bed Bugs

- Actual sightings of bed bugs. Adults may approximate the size of an apple seed, but juvenile forms and eggs may be more difficult to identify because of their small size.
- Guests who approach staff with overt bites (welts) dispersed throughout their body. However, not all guests will show signs of bites and with some guests it may be days before a welt appears.
- Bed bug droppings, which can often look like black magic marker smudges on fabric surfaces.
- The presence of casts or molted skins. As bed bugs mature, they will shed their skin on multiple occasions.
- Blood splattered linens. Often a sleeping guest will unconsciously slap at a bed bug biting resulting in a blood stain on the linens.

### If a Room Has an Incident or is Infested

- Until recently, hotels have not always been the most diligent about keeping proper documentation if they had received a report of a bed bug incident. Housekeeping needs to get in a habit of documenting any room that reports an incident of potential bed bugs.

- Most of the time, a guest will report a problem to housekeeping. In that case, housekeeping should alert a manager as soon as possible to attend to an affected guest.
- Offer to inspect a guest's luggage and place personal belongings in a dryer; 15 minutes of heat at the hottest setting available will kill any bed bugs.
- Contact your pest management professional (PMP) as soon as possible and quarantine the room. Unless there an obvious positive sign of a bed bug, the PMP will provide either visual evidence and/or a positive alert by a trained dog inspection.

- A licensed PMP will determine whether this is a bed bug incident (a few bed bugs) versus an infestation (presence of adult, juvenile and bed bug eggs).

- Whether incident or infestation, do not let objects leave the room, including linens.

- If a room is determined to be positive for bed bugs, best practice suggests that the PMP treat the adjoining rooms beside, below and above as if they were also affected.

- Do not move any furniture around. To contain the problem, have as few people involved as possible and minimize any disturbance of the room.

- When the PMP is finished treating a room, properly wash/dispose of all linens in well-sealed laundry bags. Eco-friendly dissolving laundry bags work well.

- Dedicate special cleaning products to the affected rooms. If a vacuum cleaner is used, clean the parts of a vacuum after every use with an alcohol-based or other product labeled to kill bed bugs on contact.

- To protect staff, offer to clean all uniforms onsite rather than placing them back in a locker.

- Although a room may be cleared by the PMP as available for rental, this room should be treated as a high-risk room for at least three-six months. High risk is defined as a room requiring extra care through diligent inspection by Housekeeping during daily room preparation. After this period has elapsed without a reported incident, the risk level can be lowered, but housekeeping should keep a careful eye on any previously infested room for an additional 6 months.

*This article was provided by Joseph Latino, Technical Director at Allergy Technologies LLC which specializes in active mattress liners that are used against bed bugs and dust mites. For more information on how to protect your property, contact Joseph at [joseph@allergytechnologies.com](mailto:joseph@allergytechnologies.com) or call 866-978-6288.*

