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Don't let the bedbugs bite

BY HEATHER STANEK • THE REPORTER • OCTOBER 5, 2010

Fond du Lac businesses are doing all they can to keep customers from getting the creepy crawlies.

Bedbugs — a scourge long believed to plague only the poorest dwellings — have appeared in five-star hotels, luxury apartments and clothing stores across the country. Nike just reopened its Niketown store in New York City after bedbugs forced the store to close. Bedbugs have also been found in a New York theater, office buildings, clothing shops and posh apartments, according to the Associated Press. The AP reported that exterminators recently treated the studio and limousine of shock jock Howard Stern.

Batzner Pest Management has treated a growing number of bedbug cases since 2006, said Ted Snyder, training and technical services manager and entomologist. The company serves Illinois and Wisconsin, including Fond du Lac.

Humans have lived with bedbugs throughout history, but they disappeared for unknown reasons for several years, he said. Now the little critters are back and causing big problems.

The harsh chemicals used in the past may have reduced the population, he said. Today, households and businesses have opted for safer, more eco-friendly products. The new chemicals may not be as effective at fighting the resilient bedbug.

Snyder said he's not surprised by infestations in movie theaters and shoe shops. Bedbugs can travel in clothing, suitcases, handbags and backpacks. And with people traveling more than ever before for recreation and work, it's easy for the bugs to hitch a ride to new homes.

"They're not cropping up in weird places. This is all normal," he said. "For thousands of years, people lived with bedbugs. They're just going back to all the places they were before."



A common bedbug is engorged with blood after feeding on a human arm in this undated file photo. (AP Photo/University of Florida)



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Lori Peterson, supervisor at the Days Inn in Fond du Lac, shows how a black light can be used on a bed as a first step to treating/preventing bed bugs. The hotel does not have and has never had bedbugs. (The Reporter photo by Patrick Flood)

BEDBUG DO'S AND DON'TS

Hotels respond

Craig Molitor, president of the Fond du Lac Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, said he hasn't heard of any bedbug problems in Fond du Lac, but all the hotels have trained their staff to address a potential threat.

"This community is bedbug-free," he said. "There's nothing in our neck of the woods. Right now, it seems like a big city thing."

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The bloodsuckers have cleaners on high alert, said Sanjay Patel, owner of the Super 8 motel, 391 N. Pioneer Road. In hotels, bedbugs arrive in traveler luggage, Patel said. They leave the clothes and suitcases and infest the mattress and bedding, where they start feeding and breeding.

Patel said housekeepers pay attention to the headboards, mattresses and sheets. Red or brown blood spots may signal an infestation.

Chris Field told his cleaning staff to be thorough in light of recent national news. The general manager of Days Inn, 107 N. Pioneer Road, said employees check the beds every day.

Days Inn is also moving away from standard bedspreads to triple sheeting, essentially a blanket between two sheets. It reduces the guest's contact with the blanket and allows for deeper cleaning, meaning "no stains and no critters," he said.

Housekeepers also check the bedding and behind headboards at Country Inn & Suites, 121 Merwin Way. General manager Tara Strassburg said it's a matter of watching and reacting.

"It's kind of like lice. There's not much you can do to prepare," she said. "You can be the cleanest hotel in the world and still get it."

Here are some facts about bedbugs and how to deal with them.

Do...

Know what they look like. Bedbugs are flat, oval-shaped reddish-brown insects about the size of an apple seed. Young ones are lighter colored and the size of small sesame seeds. They hide in mattresses, box springs, headboard crevices and cracks and bed frame openings. As populations grow, they'll spread to behind the baseboard, furniture and other fixtures in the bedroom.

Know the signs. Bedbugs leave blood spots on sheets or black waste spots or smears near hiding places, like mattress seams, headboards, bed frames or furniture. They may leave eggs or cast skins in cracks or seams. Their bites leave welts that look similar to mosquito bites. Marks often appear close together on skin that was left exposed while sleeping, such as arms, legs, shoulders and neck. Some people may have long-lasting, itchy spots.

Be careful buying and handling used furniture. Check it for signs of bedbugs, but keep in mind that they can hide inside a mattress or furniture where you can't see.

Check luggage and clothes after returning from a trip. Empty suitcases away from furniture and bedrooms. Take clothes straight to the dryer and run them on medium heat for 15 minutes, said Ted Snyder, training and technical services manager and entomologist for Batzner Pest Management. If only a few bedbugs are in baggage, chemicals from the store may kill them. A PackTite, which resembles a suitcase with a grill inside, may be purchased to heat baggage and other materials to kill bedbugs. The devices cost about \$300 and are available online, Snyder said.

Call an exterminator if bedbugs appear in a home, apartment or business. Exterminators have two options. They might heat the affected space and use pesticide or do three to four chemical treatments over a month and a half, Snyder said. The heating method is faster but more expensive. It could be less, but people should prepare to pay \$1,000 to \$2,000 for a treatment, and possibly more for severe infestations.

Hire an exterminator who uses a certified bedbug-sniffing dog. Snyder said it's the best way to find bugs. He has a 30 percent chance of finding one bedbug, but a dog has a 97 percent chance. Dogs are crucial, since

The managers said Super 8, Days Inn and Country Inn & Suites have never had bedbugs.

If housekeepers notice signs of bedbugs, they quarantine the room and call an exterminator, Field said.

Cleaning

Model Cleaners, 66 S. Macy St., is armed to deal with unwelcome visitors. The laundry and dry cleaning service sees about three to four cases each year, said co-owner Ed Enders.

Customers are asked to bring affected sheets, blankets and clothes in a separate bag. Items are washed or dry cleaned separately, he said. Spot treating or another cycle may be necessary. There's no additional fee for treating for bedbugs.

He said the cleaning process would kill pests, regardless of whether or not customers mention the problem. But knowing about the issue helps workers keep infected linens from coming in contact with other materials and spreading the bugs.

"The main thing is letting us know so we can keep ourselves safe and our customers safe," he said.

one surviving pregnant female bedbug will revive the population. Snyder recommended using Nescda-certified dogs because they go through rigorous yearly testing to check their sense of smell.

Consider purchasing a bedbug-resistant cover for the mattress and box spring. It's thick enough to prevent bugs from feeding, and zippers are tight enough to prevent their escape. It also protects the bed from the exterminator's chemicals.

Don't....

Pick up furniture or mattresses left on the curb.

Put luggage or belongings on someone else's bed, whether it's at a hotel or friend's house. Put belongings in the bathtub or middle of the floor and walk around the bed without leaning on it, said Snyder. Check the mattress, box spring and headboard for signs of bedbugs. If the hotel room shows signs of bedbugs, notify the front desk and book a different room.

Just throw away affected furniture and bedding. It won't solve the problem. Snyder said 70 percent of bedbugs live in or around the bed, but 23 percent live within five feet of the bed and 7 percent live beyond five feet. Bedbugs have been found in kitchens, he said.

Source: The University of Wisconsin-Extension and Ted Snyder of Batzner Pest Management
