

# Beating Bed Bugs

Information for landlords & property managers to PREVENT bed bug infestation

## What are they and how do they live?

Adult bed bugs are brown, blood-feeding insects, measuring up to  $\frac{1}{4}$ -long.



Immature ones are tiny, colorless, and are very difficult to detect. Bed bugs are active mainly at night.

Bed bugs hide in crevices in the bed and other furniture, and also behind baseboards, under loose wall-paper, etc. They can survive up to a year without feeding.

Bed bugs may be introduced to a building on used beds or furniture, or on personal possessions. Infestations in the home will spread from room to room.

## What problems do they cause?

Bed bug bites cause red, irritating marks, and some people develop an allergic skin reaction. Many people will experience disturbed sleep. Bed bugs do not spread diseases.

## As a landlord, am I responsible for dealing with infestations?

Article 11, Sec. 581(a) and 581(b)(8) of the San Francisco Health Code state that property owners cannot have pests on their property. Property owners or their agent who violate these Health Code sections may

be subject to administrative penalty for each violation.

Your tenants and a licensed pest control operator will be your partners in preventing and treating bed bug infestations. Your role will be to coordinate and ensure that all activities are carried out.

## How do I PREVENT a bed bug infestation?

- Ensure that you and your staff are familiar with the signs of bed bug infestations and how to respond quickly.
- Inspect vacant units for infestation before the next tenant moves in.
- Identify a licensed pest control operator who knows how to prevent bed bug infestations and work with the operator to establish the best prevention strategy. Research has shown that once an infestation has begun, eliminating it will involve an elaborate and often slow process. Prevention is the key.

Since the spread of bed bugs is a recent problem, many licensed pest control operators are still learning about the best available techniques for prevention and treatment. Be sure that the licensed pest control operator whom you hire uses a variety of prevention and treatment methods. A list of the best available technologies is available in the brochure titled *Beating Bed Bugs—Landlords & property managers dealing with bed bug infestations*.

- Treat crevices and wall cavities with desiccating dusts before any bed bugs are present as a preventative measure. Dust treatment of wall cavities is especially important in multi-unit buildings where the bed bugs can travel between the units through the wall cavities. Key places to dust include where pipes pass through to the other units, electrical outlets, and light-switch plates. (Note: Although desiccant dusts are less toxic than many pesticides, pesticide laws require a license to use them; ask your licensed pest control operator to do the application.)

- Caulk all spaces and joints. Bed bugs live in wall cavities and floors, moving throughout a building and spreading infestation. Caulk all joints between floors, baseboards, door frames, walls, crown molding, light fixtures, and ceilings. Caulk and seal all light-switch plates and other wall panels and install tight-fitting door sweeps.

- Avoid carpeting and consider installing hard floors. Bed bugs can hide in the fibers



of carpeting. Smooth surfaces such as wood, bamboo, and tiles will allow for easy cleaning and discourage nesting of bed bugs. Be sure to seal all joints between flooring, walls/baseboards.

- Provide shelves that are metal or otherwise slick.



Bed bugs can easily crawl up wooden or other rough and porous surfaces. If the unit is furnished, provide metal desks and bed frames. Beds should be without box springs. Box springs are perfect nesting places for bed bugs. Mattresses should be covered with a plastic cover with zippers.

- Establish an on-going monitoring program. A key part of any pest control management program is to have an on-going monitoring program to detect an infestation before it spreads. Ask your licensed pest control operator to provide sticky traps for your units.



- Communicate with tenants about bed bugs. When new tenants sign the rental lease, provide them with the brochure titled *Beating Bed Bugs—Information for tenants*. Ask them to report signs of infestation as soon as possible.

Contents adopted from *Beating Bedbugs: information for Landlords & Property Managers* and *Beating Bedbugs: Guidance on Inspection & Treatment*, Greater London Pest Liaison Group, 2009; and *Bed Bug Prevention for New & Existing Buildings*, Department of Environment of San Francisco, 2006.