

# B.I.T.E. Back!

INFORMATION YOU CAN USE TO STOP BED BUGS IN THEIR TRACKS

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## Message from the Editor

Since our last newsletter there has been lots of Chicago media attention on bed bugs. WGN, WTTW, and WMAQ all ran television news stories and the *Chicago Tribune* saw fit to publish a few stories as well. It's amazing how the closing of the flagship stores of Abercrombie and Fitch, Victoria's Secret, and Nike Town (all in NYC) due to bed bugs can get the word out. In this case the 'word' is, 'Bed bugs are back in a big way!' We here at SPCP have felt the surge in interest. In addition to the media outlets calling us for information, we've received many requests from Chicagoans – ranging from individuals to institutions – looking for help dealing with their bed bug problems. We hope that this volume of *B.I.T.E. Back!* helps answer some of those questions. Spread the word.

## Tips and Techniques for Controlling Bed Bugs

Successful bed bug control needs to be approached from many angles. In our last two issues, we showed you how to identify bed bugs and inspect for them. In this issue, we're focusing on safe and effective ways to control, prevent, and treat bed bug problems.

Contrary to popular belief, bringing back DDT will not solve the bed bug problem. Wild bed bugs (any bed bugs not born in a lab) can resist the killing effects of DDT and many other commonly used pesticides. The good news is that there are many other actions to take and tools to use to control and kill bed bugs.

Here are three basic techniques for controlling bed bugs:

### 1) Batten down the hatches! Prepare your space well.

- **Caulking and sealing:** Sealing spaces such as cracks and crevices will prevent both the movement of bed bugs and reduce their hiding places. Any cracks or crevices on walls, along baseboards, or in furniture (especially furniture close to the bed) should be painted or caulked.
- **Vacuuming and cleaning:** Vacuuming is a great way to get rid of bed bugs or knock down their numbers fast. Use a crevice tool or vacuum wand to get into hard-to-reach places. Scrape the surface as you vacuum to help remove eggs as well as bed bugs. Make sure to empty the vacuum's container or bag often – seal it in a plastic bag and throw it away outside as soon as possible. Wipe off dead bed bugs, blood stains, and droppings with hot, soapy water.
- **De-cluttering:** Bed bugs love to hide in the folds of stacked clothing, magazines, newspaper, or other clutter. Getting rid of stuff is a good way

to prevent and eliminate bed bugs. The more clutter that you can get rid of, the fewer places you'll have to look for signs of bed bugs. Store loose clothes and other items in sealed plastic bags or tightly sealed containers. Remove any items that are stored under or near the bed.

- **Mattress and box spring covers (encasements):** Whether you have bed bugs now or are trying to prevent an infestation, covering your mattress and box spring can help. It's best to buy a cover specifically designed for bed bugs. Called encasements, these mattress covers have special zippers that prevent bed bugs from getting in or out. However, the basic vinyl/plastic covers will work too, but you must duct-tape the zippers and check often for rips and tears. Bed bugs cannot bite

or claw through either type of cover. All types of mattress covers will make it easier to identify bed bug stains, since the covers are usually white and have few places for bed bugs to hide.

### 2) Heat it up! Temperature is a great tool for killing bed bugs.

- **Clothes dryer:** Heat-drying clothes and linens for at least 20 minutes in a clothes dryer on high heat will kill all stages of bed bugs. Studies have shown that dry items put in a standard home clothes dryer kills 100% of bed bugs and their eggs in as little as 5 minutes. Even most 'dry clean only' items can be put in a clothes dryer without risk of damage as long as they are not wet when put into the dryer. It's not necessary to wash items before drying, but it can only help.
- **Steam cleaning:** Steam cleaning is a great way to kill bed bugs and their eggs. There are many steam cleaners on the market for consumers. You'll want one that gets up to at least 180 to 200°F for maximum killing potential and has multiple

**Knowing what bed bugs look like and finding a bed bug problem early are very important to the speed and success of any treatment method. See *B.I.T.E. Back* Volumes 1 and 2 for details on identification and inspection at: [www.spcpweb.org/residential](http://www.spcpweb.org/residential).**

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attachments to get into hard to reach areas. The steam head should be passed slowly across the surface at the rate of 1 foot (30 cm) every 10 to 15 seconds, with the tip no more than one inch from the surface. Remember, steam is hot, so use caution when cleaning to prevent burns and always follow the manufacturer's directions.

- **Structural (whole space) heating:** Entire rooms, apartments and even buildings can be heat treated to eliminate bed bugs and their eggs. Always consult with an experienced pest control professional trained to use heat treatments, and discuss their method in detail before contracting for service. Ask for and contact references — an important source of information when making contracting decisions for any type of professional bed bug control.

### 3) Better living through chemistry? Use pesticides with great care.

Most chemical treatments (pesticides) available to the average consumer do not work well against bed bugs. None of them work against bed bug eggs. Here are some basics about what works and what doesn't. **CAUTION:** All pesticides are poisons and can cause serious injury or health problems especially in children. Always read and follow the directions on the label.

- **Diatomaceous Earth (DE):** This powder, made from crushed fossils, kills bed bugs and is generally considered non-toxic as long as it is not inhaled. It will continue to kill any hatching larvae as long as it remains dry. DE is meant to be used in the cracks and crevices that bed bugs like to call home, and not sprinkled in an open area. This powder is often used in combination with other chemical pesticides to help provide some long-lasting control.

- **Permethrin:** Many bed bug pesticide products available to consumers contain a version of this pesticide – look for '-thrin' as part of the active ingredients name. We know that bed bugs are resistant to these pesticides and their eggs are not affected at all, but they can help to kill some of the bed bugs present. Always use these products as directed. SPCP recommends that these products be used sparingly and applied directly to areas where bed bugs hide.

## Bed Bug Reality Check 101: Fact or Myth?

**There's a lot of bad information out there about bed bugs. Let's set the record straight.**

**Myth 1:** Bed bugs are only found in cheap motels and low-income housing.

**Fact:** Bed bugs are just as likely to be found in 5-star hotels and luxury condos as in bargain roadside motels and public housing. Bed bugs are great hitchhikers, moving easily from one place to another on or in clothing, furniture, suitcases, purses, boxes, and other items. Bed bugs become quickly established anywhere they have access to people.

**Myth 2:** You need a microscope to see bed bugs.

**Fact:** While their tiny pearly-white eggs may be hard to see, adult bed bugs are visible with the naked eye. An adult is oval, flat, and reddish brown in color. It's roughly the size, shape, and color of an apple seed when fully grown — a bit larger just after feeding.

## Bed Bugs and Pesticides

Bed bugs have developed an extraordinary resistance to most classes of pesticides. This means that a chemical-only approach will not work. The best solution is to combine non-chemical treatment options with targeted pesticide use. Any pesticide used should be labeled specifically for bed bug control.

NEVER USE:

- **Bed bug bombs:** Every expert will tell you that one of the worst things you can do is use an insecticide bomb against bed bugs. The bomb may cause the bed bugs to move to other rooms or units, deposit harmful pesticides on every horizontal surface in your home, and NOT solve your bed bug problem. Steer clear of all of these products.

- **Pesticide products on beds:** Pesticides must be labeled for use on beds or furniture. Before using any product on the place you sit and sleep, make sure you explore all other less toxic options.

- **Pesticides labeled 'DANGER':** There are pesticides that are created to be used by professional pest control operators only. This may be because they are extremely toxic or special training is required for proper use. If the label says, 'DANGER,' then leave its use to the professionals.

- **Agricultural pesticides:** Agricultural pesticides are created to be used outside by farmers and other trained professionals. Never use these products or any other pesticide not labeled for indoor, consumer use to control bed bugs.

- **DDT:** Using DDT is illegal in the U.S.A., and bed bugs are resistant to its killing power. Even if DDT were made legal again, it would not work because of bed bugs' extraordinary resistance to this and most other types of pesticides.

Go to [www.spcpweb.org/residential](http://www.spcpweb.org/residential) to download bed bug factsheets and other useful information.



## SAFER PEST CONTROL PROJECT

is dedicated to reducing the health risks and environmental impacts of pesticides and promoting safer alternatives in Illinois.

4611 N. Ravenswood Ave., Suite 107, Chicago, Illinois 60640 Tel: 773/878-PEST (7378) Fax: 773/878-8250 Web: [www.spcpweb.org](http://www.spcpweb.org)