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Feb 24, 2009 12:55 pm US/Central

Bed Bugs Are Biting Again, Health Officials Warn

CHICAGO (STNG) — After a dramatic decline a half-century ago, **bed bugs are on the rise again in Illinois, health officials warn.**

Reasons for the return include more worldwide travel and today's insecticides which, although safer for people, are less effective in killing these bugs, according to a release from the state Department of Public Health.

Bed bugs are small, flat insects, usually reddish-brown and up to a quarter-inch long, which cannot fly or hop, but can move quickly across floors and walls. They most commonly enter hotels or residences by "hitch-hiking" on a suitcase or backpack, used furniture or other objects moved from building to building. They can survive several months without feeding.

At night, bed bugs leave hiding places in mattresses, box springs, bed frames, nightstands, curtains, couches, baseboards, door and window frames, and carpet edges to feed, the release said. They feed on the blood of animals, including people and pets, using their beak-like mouth to painlessly pierce victim, inject saliva



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and sucks blood, all in about three to five minutes.

Public Health officials are seeing an increase in the number of calls from the public and local departments about bed bug infestations.

Although not known to transmit disease, bed bug bites can cause an intense itch and scratching could produce secondary infections. Bed bugs may be brought into well-maintained hotels and clean homes because all they need to survive is a place to hide and a host. New infestations may go undetected, allowing the infestation to grow and spread.

Signs of infestation include:

- Spots of blood left on bed sheets.
- Brownish-black specks (feces) and "shells" (shed exoskeletons).
- A peculiar musty raspberry odor from secretions.

To prevent bed bugs, the IDPH advises keeping all beds pulled slightly away from walls, furniture, and curtains. Make sure bedclothes don't touch the floor. Wrap carpet tape or duct tape around bed legs, or use traps, to prevent bed bugs from climbing onto beds and keep the floor under and around beds free of clutter.

The department also advises changing sheets and pillow cases weekly (washing in hot water or machine drying at medium or high heat).

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