



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Good Night Bugs

Acute Illnesses Associated with Insecticides Used to Control Bed Bugs — Seven States, 2003–2010

Recorded: September 27, 2011; posted: September 29, 2011

[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Bed bugs are an increasing problem in the US and around the world. It's not just the infestation, but also the cure that's causing illness in humans.

Dr. Geoffrey Calvert is a researcher with CDC's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. He's joining us today by telephone to discuss safe ways to prevent and treat infestations with bed bugs. Welcome to the show, Geoff.

[Dr. Calvert] Thank you, Bob. It's a pleasure to be here.

[Dr. Gaynes] Geoff, why have bed bugs recently become such a big problem?

[Dr. Calvert] Over the past decade in the US there's been a large increase in the population of bed bugs, and the reason for this is not clear. It's thought, perhaps, to be associated with the increased resistance of bed bugs to common pesticides. Also, because of increased international and domestic travel. And also because of budget cuts to pest control programs at state and local public health agencies.

[Dr. Gaynes] How do you know if you've got bed bugs?

[Dr. Calvert] Well, there's two ways to do it. The easiest way is to look for the rash that develops from bed bug bites. The rash typically occurs on your face, neck, arms, hands, or actually any part of your body that's bitten by the bed bugs. The rashes are small, red spots that are flat and itchy and after you itch them, they can start to swell up. The problem is though that only about 30 percent of individuals who are bitten by bed bugs develop these rashes, so if you're one of the 70 percent, the other way to identify bed bugs is to look for them, typically in your mattress or box springs. You can see them in the seams of the box spring or mattress. Another way to find them is to look for the rust-colored blood spots from their fecal material or from their crushed bodies and you can find those rust spots on your bedding.

[Dr. Gaynes] Do bed bugs carry diseases?

[Dr. Calvert] Well, bed bugs are a nuisance and they're a pest, but they're not known to carry disease.

[Dr. Gaynes] Is there a way to prevent an infestation of bed bugs?

[Dr. Calvert] There are ways to prevent infestations. One way is to avoid purchasing used mattresses or box springs. If you buy used furniture, you want to look for any signs of bed bug infestation. You can also use a protective cover to encase your mattress and box springs and this will eliminate hiding spots for bed bugs. You can also reduce the clutter in your home to reduce hiding places for bed bugs. And then, finally, if you travel, it's best to put your luggage on luggage racks and when you return from a trip to unpack your luggage – your clothing – directly into the washing machine and wash it with hot water.

[Dr. Gaynes] Geoff, what's the most effective treatment for getting rid of bed bugs?

[Dr. Calvert] Bed bugs are difficult to eradicate. There's no one treatment that is always effective. What we recommend is an integrated pest management approach. And an integrated pest management approach is an environmentally-sensitive approach that relies on common sense practices. So initially, you want to use non-chemical approaches. This would include vacuuming up any bed bugs that you can find. Also, laundering any bed bug-infested materials. You may also want to dispose of bed bug-infested materials. And also, you can heat either the materials that are infested with bed bugs or the area or rooms infested with bed bugs to a high temperature – at least 113 degrees Fahrenheit – for an hour. And if those non-chemical means don't work, then you want to then try pesticides. But you have to be careful with pesticides because we recently documented people who have become poisoned by misusing pesticides to control for bed bugs. So, to avoid misuse, you want to choose a pesticide that says on the label that it's effective for bed bugs. You want to read the label of that pesticide; make sure you follow the directions on the label. And, because you are having to resort to using pesticides to eradicate bed bugs, that means you have a pretty complex bed bug infestation, so we would recommend that you consult a professional exterminator who's got experience with integrated pest management approaches to help you eradicate your bed bug infestation.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about safe ways to treat for bed bugs?

[Dr. Calvert] They can go to www.epa.gov and in the search box, type in “bed bugs.”

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Geoff. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Geoffrey Calvert about safe and effective ways to treat an infestation of bed bugs.

Remember, many illnesses associated with bed bugs have resulted from overuse of insecticides or failure to wash or change bedding treated with an insecticide. If you've got bed bugs, check with a licensed professional about safe and effective ways to treat the problem.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.