

Bed bugs in Iowa are more plentiful, but can be avoided with care: entomologist

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(PhysOrg.com) -- The number of cases of bed bugs in Iowa is increasing, but taking a few precautions can help avoid them, according to an Iowa State University entomologist studying the problem.

Ken Holscher, associate professor of [entomology](#), has been monitoring the level of bed bug reports for almost three decades, and says there certainly has been an uptick in the number recently.

"Probably over the last 10 years and certainly over the past five, we have identified more bed bugs now than we did before," said Holscher.

The reasons for the increase are hard to pinpoint, but there are some contributing factors.

"It's probably a combination of things. First, everyone in society is more mobile than they used to be, and bed bugs are a worldwide problem. Second, there are lot more people moving [to Iowa] in the past few years, so they may bring the bed bugs with them. And last, we have changed the way we do preventative pest control spraying. We used to do a more general spray that took care of all [insects](#). For example, we now target [cockroaches](#) by using bait, which does a good job of controlling cockroaches, but doesn't do anything for bed bugs," he said.

Holscher points out that bed bugs don't transmit diseases in this country, but can be a nuisance.

Lazy bugs

"Think of a bed bug as lazy," he says. "They spend 99 percent of their time hiding. They come out very briefly at night, run right up to the bed, find the first piece of exposed skin, and feed. It takes a few minutes for them to feed, then they go back to hide again."

Bed bugs will not go under the bed covers to feed, nor will they go inside pajamas or other clothes, according to Holscher. So bites occur most often on the arms, neck and face.

One of the most common ways people get exposed to bed bugs is when they move into new residences.

Renting an apartment can mean moving into a space that is already infested with the [pests](#). People who buy property may inadvertently bring the bugs with them into a house or condominium.

Tips for travelers

Travelers may also bring back bugs from trips. There are a few simple steps Holscher recommends to avoid the unwanted hitchhikers.

Since the most likely way bed bugs stow away is in your luggage, Holscher recommends using the luggage stands provided in many hotel rooms to keep your bags off the ground and further from the bugs.

While sleeping, travelers may also want to put their bags in the bathtub. This keeps luggage far from the sleeping area - bed bugs don't usually go more than 10 to 12 feet away from a food source - and bathroom porcelain makes harder climbing for the bugs.

Wrapping your bags into a large plastic garbage sack for the night is also

a good way to avoid problems, says Holscher.

In addition to travel, bed bugs are also brought into a house with second-hand clothes and furniture.

"People love to go to flea markets and get great bargains," he said. "You should just make sure that you don't bring home more than you bargained for."

If you do pick up some bed bugs and bring them into your home, Holscher says you can try to get rid of them yourself, but it may be a job for a professional.

"You can do it yourself, but bed bugs are difficult," he said. "You really have to know how to treat them and where to treat them. Professionals will have long-lasting treatments that are needed for [bed bugs](#). But if you do hire someone, make sure they are credible."

Provided by Iowa State University

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