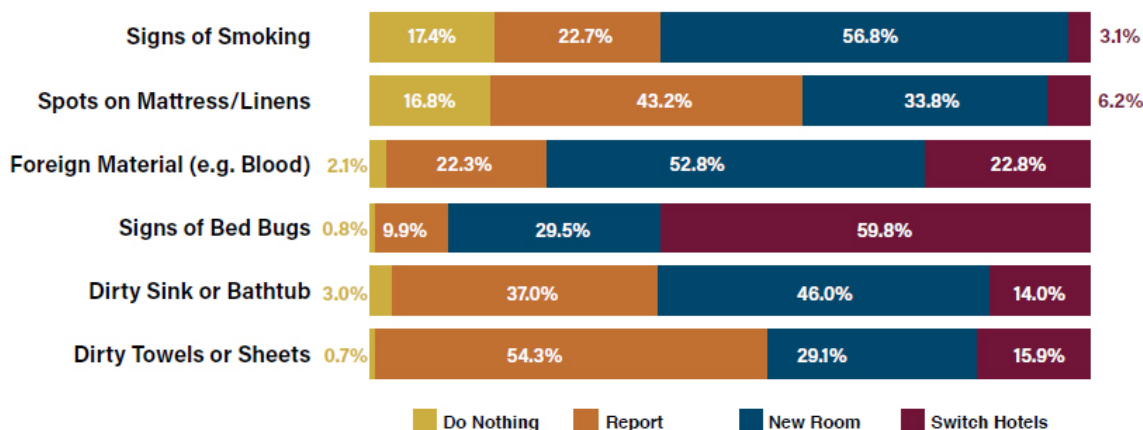


Bed bug awareness poor among US travelers, but reactions are strong

June 13 2017

U.S. Travelers' Response to Hotel-Room Issues



How would US travelers respond to problems with a hotel guest room? In a survey conducted by researchers at the University of Kentucky, respondents showed a far stronger reaction to signs of bed bugs than to any other room deficiency. Credit: Entomological Society of America

Most business and leisure travelers in the United States can't identify a bed bug, and yet the tiny pest evokes a stronger response in hotel guests than any other potential room deficiency—putting the hospitality industry in a difficult spot.

In a survey of U.S. travelers conducted by researchers at the University

of Kentucky, 60 percent said they would switch hotels if they found evidence of bed bugs in a guest room. Meanwhile, no more than a quarter said they would switch hotels for factors such as signs of smoking or dirty towels or linens. In the same survey, however, just 35 percent of business travelers and 28 percent of leisure travelers correctly identified a bed bug in a lineup of other common insects. The results of the research are soon to be published in *American Entomologist*, the quarterly magazine of the Entomological Society of America.

"Considering all the media attention paid to bed bugs in recent years, the fact that most travelers still have a poor understanding of them is troubling," says Michael Potter, Ph.D., extension professor in UK's Department of Entomology and co-author of the study.

It is particularly problematic given the central role that online reviews play in travelers' selection of where to stay. More than half of survey respondents said they would be very unlikely to choose a hotel with a single online report of bed bugs.



Which of these common insect pests is a bed bug? In a survey conducted by researchers at the University of Kentucky, just 35 percent of US business travelers and 28 percent of leisure travelers could correctly identify the bed bug. Poor awareness of bed bugs enables their spread and causes problems for the

hotel and lodging industry. The answers: 1-Ant, 2-Termite, 3-Louse, 4-Bed Bug, 5-Tick. Credit: Entomological Society of America

"From a hotel industry perspective, it's worrisome that a single online report of bed bugs would cause the majority of travelers to book different accommodations, irrespective of whether the report is accurate. Furthermore, the incident could have involved only one or a few rooms, which the hotel previously eradicated," says Jerrod M. Penn, Ph.D., postdoctoral scholar in UK's Department of Agricultural Economics and lead author of the study.

Other findings in the survey include:

- Despite a highly negative impression of bed bugs, more than half (56 percent) of respondents said they either never considered the threat of bed bugs while traveling or considered it but were not worried.
- If a hotel were to proactively provide information on the steps it takes to prevent [bed bug infestations](#), 46 percent of respondents said they would stay at the hotel and would appreciate knowing about those measures. The second most common response, however, was "do it, but don't tell me" (24 percent).
- An overwhelming majority (80 percent) of respondents said hotels should be required to tell guests if their room has had a prior problem with bed bugs. Among those who wanted such a disclosure, 38 percent of [business travelers](#) and 51 percent of leisure travelers said they would want to know of prior infestations going back a least one year or more.
- Responses to bed bug concerns were generally consistent across various demographic cross-sections in the survey.

Potter notes that the public's lack of understanding of bed bugs "contributes to their spread throughout society as a whole." But the hospitality industry must deal with both the pest itself and consumers' strong, if ill-informed, attitudes about bed bugs.

"Hotels and others in the hospitality sector should develop a reputation management plan to prudently respond to online reports of bed bugs in their facility. Hotels should also train their housekeeping and engineering staffs to recognize and report bed bugs in the earliest possible stages, when infestations are more manageable. Similarly important is training front desk and customer service employees to respond promptly and empathetically when incidents arise within the [hotel](#)," says Wuyang Hu, Ph.D., professor in UK's Department of Agricultural Economics and senior author of the study..

More information: Jerrod M. Penn et al, Bed Bugs and Hotels, *American Entomologist* (2017). [DOI: 10.1093/ae/tmx023](https://doi.org/10.1093/ae/tmx023)

Provided by Entomological Society of America

Citation: Bed bug awareness poor among US travelers, but reactions are strong (2017, June 13) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-06-bed-bug-awareness-poor-reactions.html>

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