Don't let the bedbugs bite!

The holiday season has many individuals traveling to and from motels and homes of friends and relatives. Adult children may be coming home from college. This is a time that individuals may come in contact with bedbugs and inadvertently introduce them to their homes.

Bedbugs are one of the most difficult insects to eradicate once they become established in a home. According to Orkin Pest Control Company, Ohio has the distinction of having two cities in the top 10 of American large cities battling bedbugs. Columbus is ranked fifth and Cincinnati eighth. Bedbugs continue to be a problem in Hancock and surrounding counties.

Once a home becomes infested, a commercial exterminator will be required and it may take them several applications to eradicate the problem. Prevention is the least expensive and the best method in controlling bedbugs.

Bedbugs like to hitchhike on clothing, luggage and other items that come in contact with an infested location. Some of these locations may include apartments, motels, summer camps and homes of friends and relatives.

Inspect items that are being brought into your home after traveling and especially items from children returning from apartments, dormitories and camps. While staying at a motel, check the bed, mattress, springs and wall hangings for signs of bedbugs.

Often adult bedbugs are not seen in motel rooms with infestations. Look for rusty to dark spots of excrement on sheets and mattresses, bedding and walls. Fecal spots, eggshells and shed skins may also be found in the vicinity of their hiding places.

EDWIN LENTZ
COUNTY AGENT

If anything suspicious is found, request another room. Also, do not leave clothing, open suitcases or other containers on beds not in use even if a room appears to be clean.

Store luggage on the stands provided in many motels. Do not store clothing in the dressers. Keep bags zipped when not in use. Keep them away from beds and upholstered furniture.

Upon return, check bags and containers for bedbugs before moving them to the bedroom. Clothing should be removed from luggage and washed in hot water (hot water kills bedbugs).

Similar precautions should be taken when family members move back home after being in an apartment or dormitory or return from a winter trip.

Another source of bedbugs is used bedding, mattresses, couches, recliners and other upholstered furniture. Extra caution should be used when purchasing used items and remember, “free” mattresses for you to pick up may bring other gifts that you will regret.

Avoid bedrooms and upholstered furniture if you have to enter a premises that you suspect may have bedbugs. Bedbugs will be in areas where people sleep. Kitchen and hardback chairs would be the choice area to minimize contact with bedbugs. Be careful where you set down items such as backpacks, bags, purses and coats.

An insect in a bedroom does not mean it is a bedbug, particularly if it is flying or has wings. Bedbugs do not have wings. Bedbug adults are brown to reddish-brown, oval-shaped, flattened and about 3/16 to 1/5 inch long.

Their shape resembles the undeveloped seeds found occasionally in seedless watermelons. The body becomes more elongated, swollen and dark red after a blood meal.

Juveniles are nymphs that may be much smaller and almost clear until feeding. Female bedbugs may deposit one to twelve eggs per day. Bedbugs are fast-moving insects that are nocturnal. They feed mostly at night when their host is asleep.

The bite is painless. A small, hard, swollen, white welt may develop at the site of each bite.

Rows of three or so wells or exposed skin are characteristic signs of bedbugs. Wells do not have a red spot in the center, as is characteristic of fleabites.

Rusty-red spots or streaks on bed sheets is another indicator that bed bugs may be feeding. In many cases the excrement of bed bugs is found in a bedroom before the actual sighting of the insect.

If you suspect that your home has been infested with bedbugs, look for the signs and try to confirm identification of an adult. Insects may be brought to the Ohio State University Extension office to confirm identification, but make sure they are in a sealed container.

Bedbugs are difficult to eliminate once established in a dwelling. Over-the-counter baits, insect logs, insect bombs, and do-it-yourself remedies do not work.

Eradication will most likely require a professional exterminator, several insecticide applications, extensive cleaning and sanitation, and perseverance and patience.

Bedbugs do not reflect one’s status in life. Generally everyone will have to deal with an insect parasite or pest some time in their life whether it be mosquitoes, ticks, fleas, lice, chiggers or cockroaches.

Disease may be associated with some of the insects listed above; fortunately, bedbugs are generally not a carrier of more serious diseases. However, some individuals may be more allergic and react to their bites.

Good sanitation in the home is the best defense for all types of insect concerns. However, precaution is the best defense against bedbugs and careful travelers should take steps to prevent their unwelcome visit.

Dr. Susan Jones, Ohio State University entomologist, has extensive information on her bedbug website: http://u.osu.edu/bedbugs/. She has also developed an app for iOS and Android systems, which includes bedbug identification pictures and management information. The app is free and may be downloaded by searching for Bed Bug Field Guide.

Since Christmas and New Year’s Day fall on a Tuesday, this will be my last column for the year. My column will return on Jan. 8, 2019, with a recap of agricultural events from 2018. Have a merry Christmas and a blessed New Year!

Lentz is extension educator for agriculture and natural resources for Ohio State University Extension Service in Hancock County. He can be reached at 419-422-3851 or via email at lentz.38@osu.edu.

Lentz can be heard with Vaun Wickerham on weekdays at 6:35 a.m. on WFIN, at 5:43 a.m. on WKXA-FM, and at 5:28 a.m. at 106.3 The Fox.