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# Housing Durham Guide to Preventing and Managing Pests

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Adapted from the Halton Community Housing Corporation Pest Education Handbook.

Halton Community Housing Corporation
Housing Services Division
Social & Community Services

**Think you may have pests?**

Report the problem to Housing Durham as soon as possible by calling 311 or emailing pestcontrol@durham.ca.

Do not use sprays, foggers or home remedies unless Housing Durham or the pest control professional tells you to do so.

Do not move furniture or other items that may have pests. Moving them could spread the pests to other parts of your home or building.

Housing Durham will focus on addressing the pest problem. You will not be blamed for reporting pests.

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# About This Guide

Pests can happen in any home. This guide explains how to identify common pests, report concerns and understand what happens if treatment is needed.

The guide focuses on the three most common pests found in homes:

- Bed bugs.
- Cockroaches.
- Mice.

You will find information about:

- Common signs of pests.
- Steps you can take to help prevent pests.
- How to report a pest concern.
- What happens after a concern is reported.
- How to prepare for pest treatment if it is needed.

**Remember**

Finding pests does not mean your home is dirty or that you have done something wrong. Pests can enter buildings in many ways and can affect anyone.

The most important thing you can do is report pest concerns as soon as possible. Early reporting helps Housing Durham respond quickly and prevent the problem from spreading.

# Think You May Have Pests?

**Report the Concern Right Away**

If you think you may have bed bugs, cockroaches, mice or another pest in your unit, contact Housing Durham as soon as possible.

Early reporting helps:

- Identify the problem sooner.
- Prevent pests from spreading.
- Make treatment more effective.
- Reduce disruption in your home.

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### You Can Report a Pest Concern By:

- Calling 311.
- Emailing pestcontrol@durham.ca

### While You Wait

If you suspect pests are present:

- Avoid using store-bought sprays, bug bombs or foggers.
- Avoid moving furniture or belongings that may contain pests.
- Wait for instructions from Housing Durham or the pest control professional.
- Keep any evidence of the pest, if it can be done safely (for example, a photograph).

### Reporting Helps Everyone

Pests can move between units and common areas. Reporting concerns early helps protect your home, your neighbours and the building.

## What Happens After You Report a Pest?

### Housing Durham Will Review the Concern

Once a pest concern is reported, Housing Durham will determine the best next steps based on the information provided.

This may include:

1. Arranging an inspection.
2. Scheduling a visit from a pest control professional.
3. Providing instructions on how to prepare your unit.
4. Arranging treatment based on the type of pest found.
5. Scheduling follow-up visits if additional inspections or treatment are needed.

You may be asked to allow access to your unit and complete preparation steps before treatment can take place. If you need help understanding or completing the instructions, tell Housing Durham staff as soon as possible.

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### You May Receive Instructions

Some pest treatments require preparation before treatment can take place.

For example, you may be asked to:

- Wash and bag clothing or bedding.
- Move items away from walls.
- Reduce clutter in specific areas.
- Provide access to rooms or furniture.

If preparation is required, clear instructions will be provided.

### Working Together

Successful pest treatment is a shared effort.

Housing Durham, pest control professionals and tenants each play a role in identifying pest concerns, completing treatment and preventing pests from spreading.

If you need help understanding treatment instructions or have questions about what is required, contact Housing Durham as soon as possible.

## Our No Blame Approach

Pests can happen in any home. Having pests does not mean your home is dirty or that you have done something wrong.

Housing Durham encourages you to report pests as soon as possible. Staff will focus on addressing the problem, not assigning blame.

Pests can be found in any type of housing and can affect anyone.

### Why Early Reporting Matters

People sometimes feel embarrassed or worried about reporting pests. Waiting to report a concern can allow pests to spread and make treatment more difficult.

Reporting concerns early helps Housing Durham respond more quickly and improves the chances of successful treatment.

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**We Are Here to Help**

When a pest concern is reported, Housing Durham's focus is on addressing the problem and providing support throughout the treatment process.

Staff, tenants and pest control professionals all play an important role in helping manage pest concerns.

**Remember**

Pest control works best when concerns are reported early, information is shared openly and everyone works together toward the same goal: a safe, healthy home.

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# Bed Bugs

## What Are Bed Bugs?



Bed bugs are small insects that feed on human blood. Adult bed bugs are reddish-brown and about the size of an apple seed.

Bed bugs are often found in places where people sleep or spend a lot of time, including:

- Mattresses.
- Box springs.
- Bed frames.
- Couches and upholstered furniture.
- Cracks and small openings near beds and furniture.

**Anyone Can Get Bed Bugs**

Bed bugs can be found in any type of housing.

Having bed bugs does not mean:

- Your home is dirty.
- You did something wrong.
- You are not taking care of your home.

Bed bugs can happen to anyone.

## Signs of Bed Bugs



You may have bed bugs if you notice:

- Live bed bugs.
- Tiny white eggs or eggshells.
- Dark spots on bedding, mattresses or furniture.
- Shed skins.
- Small blood spots on bedding.
- Unexplained itchy bites.

Not everyone reacts to bed bug bites. Seeing bites alone does not confirm that bed bugs are present.

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**Common Places to Check**

Look around:

- Mattress seams and edges.
- Box springs.
- Headboards.
- Bed frames.
- Couches and chairs.
- Dressers and nightstands.
- Cracks and small gaps near beds and furniture.

## What Should I Do If I Think I Have Bed Bugs?

Report the concern to Housing Durham as soon as possible.

Early reporting helps:

- Prevent bed bugs from spreading.
- Make treatment easier.
- Reduce the number of treatment visits that may be needed.

While waiting for instructions:

- Leave items where they are unless you are told otherwise.
- Avoid moving furniture or belongings to another room.
- Follow any instructions provided by Housing Durham or the pest control professional.

## What Should I Avoid Doing?

Do not:

- Use bug bombs or foggers.
- Use store-bought sprays or pesticides.
- Try home remedies found online.
- Throw away furniture unless you are told it cannot be treated.
- Sleep in another room to avoid bites.

These actions can make treatment more difficult and may allow bed bugs to spread to other areas.

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## Preventing Bed Bugs

There is no way to completely prevent bed bugs, but these steps can help reduce the risk:

**When Bringing Items into Your Home**

- Inspect used furniture carefully.
- Check second-hand clothing and other items before bringing them inside.
- Do not bring home mattresses or furniture that have been left outside or placed near garbage areas.

**When Travelling**

- Inspect hotel rooms before unpacking.
- Keep luggage away from beds and walls.
- Check luggage when you return home.
- Dry clothing on high heat after travelling when possible.

**Around the Home**

- Reduce clutter.
- Vacuum regularly.
- Check beds and furniture periodically.
- Report concerns early.

**Remember**

The sooner bed bugs are reported, the easier they are to treat.

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# Cockroaches

## What Are Cockroaches?

Cockroaches are common household pests that search for food, water and shelter. Cockroaches often hide during the day and become active at night.

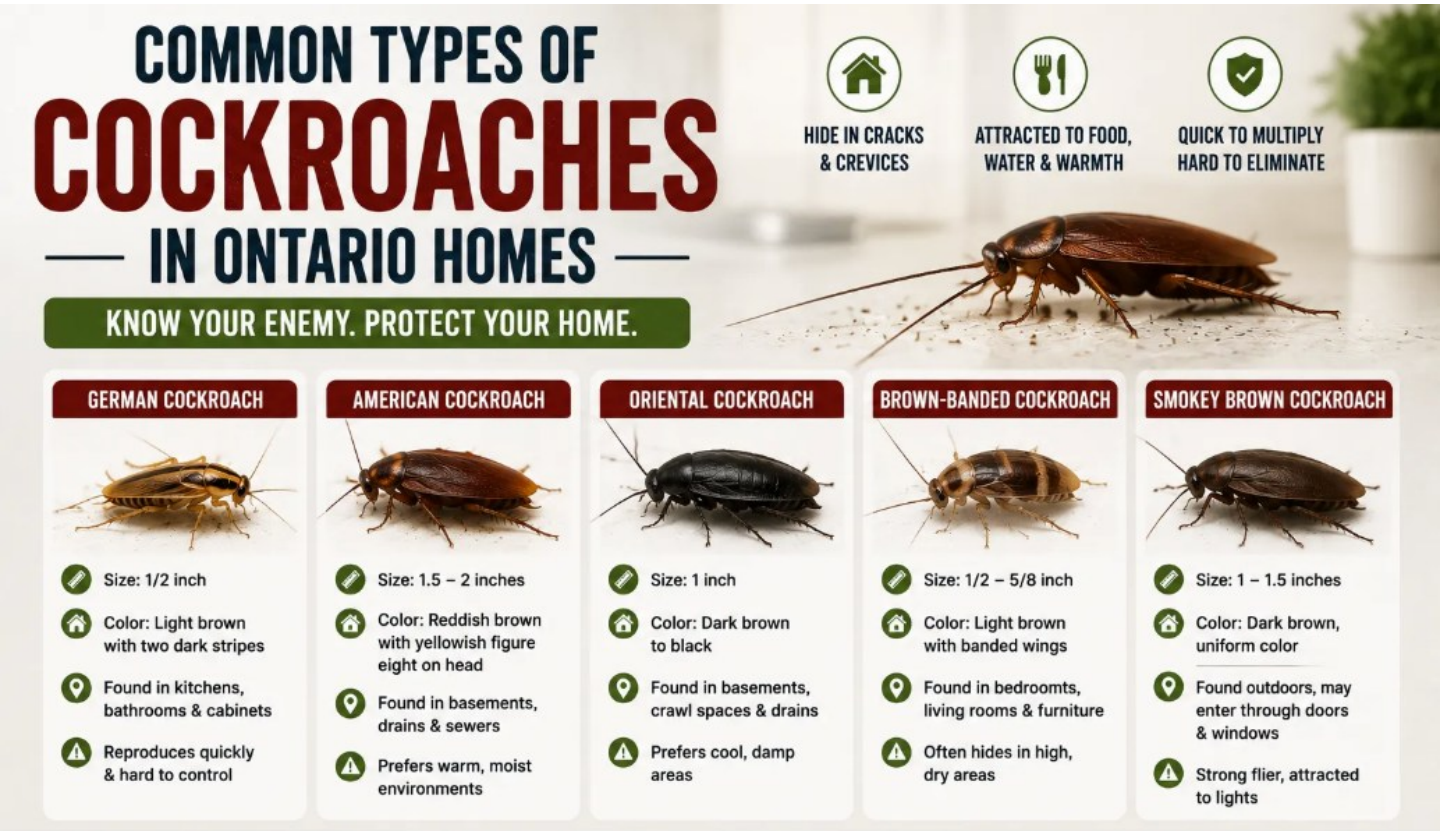


Image used from https://www.axepest.ca/common-types-of-cockroaches-found-in-ontario/

They are commonly found:

- In kitchens.
- In bathrooms.
- Under sinks.
- Behind appliances.
- Inside cupboards and cabinets.
- Near food and water sources.

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## Signs of Cockroaches

You may have cockroaches if you notice:

- Live or dead cockroaches.
- Small black droppings that look like pepper or coffee grounds.
- Brown egg cases.
- A strong, musty odour.

**Places to Check**

Look:

- Under sinks.
- Inside cupboards.
- Behind refrigerators and stoves.
- Around pipes and drains.
- Near garbage and recycling containers.

Cockroaches are good at hiding, so you may notice signs of an infestation before you see a live cockroach.

## What Should I Do If I Think I Have Cockroaches?

Report the concern to Housing Durham as soon as possible.

Early reporting helps:

- Prevent cockroaches from spreading.
- Reduce the size of the pest problem.
- Improve treatment outcomes.

Follow any instructions provided by Housing Durham or a pest control professional.

## What Should I Avoid Doing?

Do not rely on:

- Store-bought sprays.
- Home remedies.
- Repeated pesticide use.

Many cockroaches are resistant to common sprays, and some products may cause them to spread to other areas. Professional treatment is often the most effective approach.

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## Reducing Food, Water, and Hiding Places

Cockroaches are attracted to areas where food, water and shelter are available.

You can help reduce these conditions by:

- Storing food in sealed containers.
- Cleaning crumbs and spills.
- Emptying garbage regularly.
- Reducing clutter.
- Reporting plumbing leaks or moisture problems.
- Cleaning behind appliances when possible.

These steps may reduce conditions that attract cockroaches, but they cannot prevent all pest problems.

If you see signs of cockroaches, report the concern right away.

**Remember**

Cockroaches can move between units and buildings. Reporting concerns early helps protect your home and your neighbours'.

# Mice

## Identifying Mice

Mice can enter buildings in search of food, water and shelter.

Mice can fit through very small openings and are often most active at night.

## Signs of Mice

You may have mice if you notice:

- Small, dark droppings.
- Food packaging that has been chewed.
- Scratching sounds in walls, ceilings or cupboards.
- Strong odours.
- Tracks or marks in dusty areas.

Common places to look include:

- Kitchens.
- Cupboards.
- Pantries.
- Under sinks.
- Behind appliances.

## What Should I Do If I Think I Have Mice?

Report the concern to Housing Durham as soon as possible.

Housing Durham can review the concern and determine whether an additional inspection, maintenance work or pest control services are required.

**You Can Also Help By:**

- Storing food in sealed containers.
- Cleaning crumbs and spills.
- Emptying garbage regularly.
- Reporting holes, gaps or openings that may need repair.

## Reducing Conditions That Attract Mice

Mice are attracted to areas where food and water are easy to find.

**Food**

Help limit access to food by:

- Keeping food in sealed containers.
- Cleaning food preparation areas.
- Putting away pet food after use.
- Washing dishes regularly.

**Water**

Help limit access to water by:

- Cleaning up spills.

- Avoiding standing water.
- Reporting leaky pipes or plumbing concerns.

**Shelter**

Mice like quiet places where they can hide.

You can help by:

- Reducing clutter.
- Keeping storage areas organized.
- Reporting openings that may need repair.

## Cleaning Mouse Droppings Safely

If you find mouse droppings:

- Wear disposable gloves.
- Use a disinfectant or an approved cleaning product.
- Wipe droppings with paper towels.
- Place waste in a sealed garbage bag.
- Wash your hands thoroughly afterward.

Do not:

- Sweep dry droppings.
- Vacuum dry droppings.
- Handle droppings or dead mice with bare hands.

If there is a large amount of droppings or you are unsure what to do, contact Housing Durham for guidance.

**Remember**

Mice can be difficult to detect at first. Reporting concerns early helps Housing Durham respond before a small problem becomes a bigger problem.

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# Reporting a Pest Concern

## Report Pest Concerns Early

If you think you may have bed bugs, cockroaches, mice or another pest in your unit, report the concern as soon as possible.

Early reporting helps:

- Identify the problem sooner.
- Prevent pests from spreading.
- Make treatment more effective.
- Reduce disruption in your home.

Even if you are not sure what type of pest you have seen, it is better to report the concern and let Housing Durham assess the situation.

## How to Report a Pest Concern

You can report a pest concern by:

Calling 311.

When reporting a concern, provide as much information as possible, including:

- The type of pest you have seen, if known.
- Where you saw the pest.
- When you first noticed signs of the pest.
- Any photographs or information that may help identify the problem.

Do not worry if you are unsure what type of pest you have found. Housing Durham can help determine the next steps.

## When Should I Report a Pest Concern?

Report a concern as soon as you notice:

- Live insects or rodents.
- Droppings.
- Pest-related damage.
- Bites that may be caused by pests.

- Strong or unusual odours that may indicate pest activity.
- Any other signs described in this guide.

Do not wait until the problem becomes more serious.

## After You Report

Housing Durham will review the concern and determine the appropriate response.

Depending on the situation, this may include:

- An inspection.
- Pest control services.
- Maintenance repairs.
- Preparation instructions.
- Follow-up visits.

You may be asked to provide access to your unit or complete preparation steps before treatment can take place.

If preparation is required, Housing Durham or a pest control professional will provide instructions.

## Need Help?

If you are unsure whether you have a pest problem, have questions about treatment instructions or need assistance understanding what to do, contact Housing Durham.

Staff are available to answer questions, and help you access the appropriate supports and services.

**Key Message**

Pests can happen in any home. Reporting concerns early is the best way to prevent pests from spreading, and to support a timely and effective response from Housing Durham.

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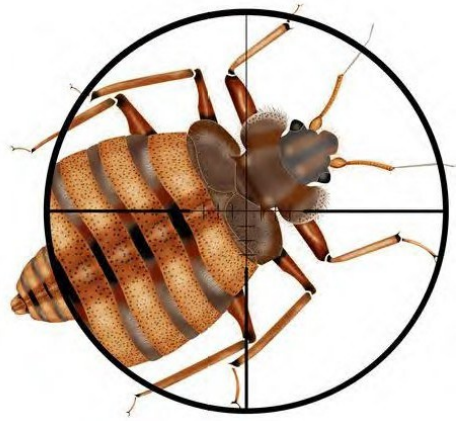
# Appendix A: Preparing for Bed Bug Treatment



## Why Preparation Matters

Bed bug treatment is most effective when you follow the preparation instructions provided by Housing Durham or the pest control professional. The instructions you receive should always be followed.

The information in this appendix provides general guidance to help you understand the preparation process.

## Prepare Your Unit

You may be asked to:

- Reduce clutter in areas being treated.
- Move items away from walls.
- Empty certain drawers or storage areas.
- Place clothing and bedding in sealed bags.
- Allow access to beds, furniture, closets and other areas.

Follow all instructions provided before treatment.

If you have questions or need assistance understanding the instructions, contact Housing Durham as soon as possible.

**Laundry Preparation**

Bed bugs can hide in clothing, bedding, towels and other fabric items.

You may be asked to:

- Place laundry in tightly sealed bags before moving it.
- Wash items using the hottest water the fabric allows.
- Dry items on the highest heat setting recommended for the fabric.

Store cleaned items in new sealed bags or containers until treatment is complete. The heat from a clothes dryer is one of the most effective ways to kill bed bugs and their eggs.

**Important**

Do not reuse bags that previously contained unwashed items. Clean items should be stored separately from untreated items.

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## Step 1: Gather and Sort Your Laundry



Wash all fabric items from the area where bed bugs were found, including:

- Clothing.
- Bedding and blankets.
- Pillowcases and pillows.
- Towels.
- Small rugs.
- Fabric items stored in drawers, closets or on the floor.

Before moving laundry:

- Sort clothes as you normally would.
- Place each group of laundry in a separate plastic bag.
- Tie each bag tightly and label it "To Wash."

**Clean or Dry-Clean-Only Items**

Some items may not need to be washed but should still be treated for bed bugs.

For clean clothing and other fabric items:

- Place them in a plastic bag labeled "Dryer Only."
- Dry them on high heat for 30 minutes.

For dry-clean-only items:

- Take them to a dry cleaner, or
- Place them in the dryer on high heat for 30 minutes if it is safe to do so.

## Step 2: Wash and Dry Your Laundry

To prevent bed bugs from spreading:

- Take laundry to the laundry room in sealed plastic bags.
- Empty the bags directly into the washing machine.
- Do not place untreated laundry on tables, chairs or the floor.

After emptying the bags:

- Place the empty bags into another plastic bag.
- Seal it tightly.
- Throw it away in an outdoor garbage bin.
- Do not reuse the bags.

**Washing and Drying**

- Wash items using the hottest water the fabric allows.
- Dry items on the highest heat setting.
- Once the items are dry, keep drying them on high heat for at least another 20 minutes.

The heat from the dryer is what kills bed bugs and their eggs.

**Items That Only Need Drying**

Clean items that do not need washing, such as wool items, shoes, plush toys, pillows and dry-clean-only clothing, should be dried on high heat for 30 minutes.

Do not overload the dryer.

## Step 3: Store Clean Items Safely

After drying:

- Fold laundry right away.
- Place clean items into new, clean plastic bags or sealed containers.
- Do not reuse the bags that held unwashed laundry.

If your unit is being treated for bed bugs:

- Keep clean items sealed until treatment is complete.
- Set aside only the clothing and bedding you need.
- Store those items in a resealable container or bag.
- Remove items as needed and reseal the container after each use.
- Do not put worn clothing back into the clean container.

Leave other sealed bags closed until pest control treatment is finished and your home is free of bed bugs.

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## After Each Pest Control Treatment

- If a bed bug mattress cover (encasement) has been installed, leave it on the mattress permanently.
- Do not remove the encasement.
- Place your clean sheets, blankets, mattress pad and pillowcases over the encasement.

Any clothing, bedding or fabric items used between treatments should be washed and dried again using the same steps above before the next scheduled treatment.

**Remember**

Laundry is an important part of getting rid of bed bugs. Washing and drying items correctly, keeping clean items sealed, and following pest control instructions will help make treatment more successful and prevent bed bugs from coming back.

## Vacuuming

Vacuuming may help remove bed bugs and their eggs before treatment.

Pay close attention to:

- Mattresses.
- Bed frames.
- Upholstered furniture.
- Baseboards.
- Carpets and rugs.
- Cracks and crevices.

After vacuuming:

- Place vacuum contents in a sealed plastic bag.
- Dispose of the bag in an outdoor garbage container.

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**Remember**

Preparation is an important part of successful treatment. Following instructions carefully can help improve treatment outcomes and reduce the chance of bed bugs returning.

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# Appendix B: Bed Bug Mattress Covers (Encasements)

## What Is a Mattress Encasement?



A mattress encasement is a protective cover that completely surrounds a mattress or box spring.

An encasement can help by:

- Trapping bed bugs already inside the mattress.
- Preventing new bed bugs from entering.
- Making inspections easier.
- Reducing hiding places.

**Choosing an Encasement**

If you choose to purchase an encasement:

- Select one designed specifically for bed bugs.
- Ensure it fully seals around the mattress or box spring.
- Check that the zipper closes securely.

**Using an Encasement**

Once installed:

- Leave the encasement in place.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Cover the encasement with regular bedding as needed.

Mattress encasements can support professional bed bug treatment, but they should not be used as a replacement for pest control treatment.

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**Remember**

You do not usually need to throw away a mattress because of bed bugs. In many cases, mattresses can be treated successfully.

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# Appendix C: If You Have Bed Bugs: What Not To Do

## Avoid Common Mistakes

When people discover bed bugs, they often try to solve the problem quickly. Some actions can actually make treatment more difficult.

**Do Not**

- Use bug bombs or foggers.
- Rely on home remedies found online.
- Use multiple store-bought pesticides.
- Move infested furniture to another room.
- Throw away furniture unless instructed to do so.
- Delay reporting the problem.

These actions may cause bed bugs to spread to other rooms or make treatment less effective.

## Continue Sleeping in Your Bed

If possible, continue using your regular sleeping area unless you are instructed otherwise.

Moving to another room may cause bed bugs to spread to other areas of your home.

## Do Not Feel Embarrassed

Bed bugs can be found in any type of housing.

Having bed bugs does not mean:

- Your home is dirty.
- You have done anything wrong.
- You are not taking care of your home.

Bed bugs can happen to anyone.

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**Remember**

Early reporting and professional treatment are the most effective ways to address a bed bug problem.