





BY LARRY PINTO, RICHARD COOPER AND SANDRA KRAFT

After residents have vacated their apartments, ensure that all unwanted insect guests have left as well.

No community manager wants a new resident to discover bed bugs in their newly rented apartment. But if the apartment was previously infested, how can they be sure that every last bed bug has been eliminated before a new resident moves in? Should a unit be treated once? Twice? Three times? It is difficult to kill every last bed bug, and bed bug eggs in protected sites will continue to hatch for weeks.

Determining when a bed bug infestation is eliminated in a vacant apartment is hard work—even more so than when operating in an occupied site. After all, no one is being bitten in a vacant unit. Furthermore, bed bugs tend to be inactive and to remain in hiding in the absence of a host.

Property managers may not discover that an apartment has a bed bug infestation until after the resident has vacated and the maintenance staff enters the unit to prepare it for the next resident. Other times, residents will terminate their lease when they discover that they have bed bugs, vacating the unit before the infestation has been eliminated.

Determining that an apartment is bed-bug free can be tricky. The apartment



Cities With Worst Bed Bug Infestations

Following are the 15 cities most infested by bed bugs, based on market-specific call volume about bed bugs to the 350 Terminix service centers nationwide.

1. New York
2. Philadelphia
3. Detroit
4. Cincinnati
5. Chicago
6. Denver
7. Columbus, Ohio
8. Dayton, Ohio
9. Washington, D.C.
10. Los Angeles
11. Boston
12. Indianapolis
13. Louisville
14. Cleveland
15. Minneapolis

would have to be vacant for over a year (that's how long bed bugs can live without feeding), not be attached to another occupied unit where bugs could have migrated, and contain no alternate hosts, such as a mouse somewhere in the structure. Obviously it is impossible to guarantee all of these things. Bed bugs have been known to persist at very low numbers in vacated apartments for more than five months. Continued inspections and treatments, regardless of how thorough they are, cannot guarantee that 100 percent of the bugs are eliminated.

Put It in the Lease

There are steps that property managers can take to minimize the chances that new residents encounter bed bugs. First, try and eliminate any bed bug infestation before an apartment becomes vacant. Consider adding language to the rental lease agreement that upon notice of the lease termination an inspection of the unit will be conducted. In the event the inspection uncovers evidence of bed bugs, there may be enough time to eliminate the problem before the unit is vacated.

If the unit becomes vacant while it is still infested, or the infestation is not discovered until after the resident has left, the manager may need to take more aggressive

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measures to ensure that the bugs are gone before putting the unit back on the market. Aggressive measures might include:

1. Intensive treatment of the infested unit. Both insecticide treatments and nonchemical measures should be more intensive in vacant units than in units that are occupied because the bugs will not be actively moving around the unit in the same manner as when they are seeking a blood meal. Treatments in vacant units might include more aggressive treatments into wall voids and under and behind baseboards and other moldings. Consider removing moldings to enable a more thorough application and to remove a protected harborage. Also consider steam cleaning all carpets.



It's Hard to Tell if They're Gone

These factors make it difficult to declare an infestation eliminated.

- **No inexpensive, reliable monitoring devices** exist today (bed bug dogs and expensive electronic detectors are effective but expensive)
- **Low level bed bug populations** can easily go undetected during a visual inspection
- **Eggs that were missed** or were in inaccessible areas will hatch
- **Between blood meals**, bed bugs go into hiding and are inactive and more likely to escape the effects of insecticide treatments
- **Bed bugs often stop biting** after insecticide treatments
- **Bed bug behavior** in the absence of a host is poorly understood
- **The role** of alternate hosts is unclear
- **There is no way** to tell whether newly appearing bed bugs are leftovers from a previously treated infestation or have been newly introduced



2. Proactive measures in adjacent units that share a common wall with the infested unit. Inspect all adjoining units (above, below, and to the sides) on a regular basis until the vacant unit has been placed back onto the market. The longer the unit remains vacant, the greater the likelihood that bugs will migrate into surrounding units in search of a blood meal. Adjoining units can also be treated proactively, although it is unclear just how effective this measure will be in preventing bed bugs. Encasing mattresses and box springs in the adjoining units will protect them from infestation, and any migrating bed bugs will be easier to detect during subsequent inspections.

3. Ongoing inspections of the vacant unit. Employ all techniques considered practical, including visual inspection, monitoring with sticky traps, electronic detectors and canine scent detection (bed bug dogs) where available.

4. Documentation of all actions taken. Keep detailed records of every action to demonstrate that you have taken reasonable steps to ensure that bed bugs were no longer present before you placed the apartment back on the market. **NA**

This article was adapted from Bed Bug Handbook: The Complete Guide to Bed Bugs and Their Control by Larry Pinto, Richard Cooper and Sandra Kraft.

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Bed Bug Handbook

The Complete Guide to Bed Bugs and Their Control

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Pinto & Associates, Inc.