

Bedbugs and Other Infestations in Retail

The problem of bedbugs is not limited to beds. While most infestations are located in hotels, homes and hospitals, any building with carpet, fabric or furniture is at risk—and bedbugs are easily transported from one location to another, so high-traffic retail spaces face extra risk. Although bedbugs are not known to spread disease, they do cause painful, itchy welts that can be miserable and psychologically tortuous for those who come into contact with them. To avoid damage to your brand and a difficult public relations situation, plan and prepare for an infestation so you are able to respond quickly should the need arise.

Identifying an Infestation

Staff members should conduct regular inspections to discover infestations before a customer does. Instruct staff to inspect all areas of your store and stock areas, looking for living or dead bugs, small bloodstains from crushed insects and dark spots from droppings. These identifiers can be anywhere, from floor boards to walls or carpeting. Bedbugs themselves are often found in hidden places such as cracks or crevices.

When an Infestation is Discovered

It is crucial to have a plan in place to address an infestation, should you find one. Swift action ensures minimum liability and the least damage to your reputation. When an infestation has been confirmed, close the store to the public immediately, and direct staff to take the following actions:

- Use a stiff brush to dislodge bedbugs and eggs.
- Use a HEPA vacuum on furniture, floor, fabric,

merchandise and carpeted areas.

- Discard the vacuum bag in a sealed plastic bag.

When these steps have been taken, conduct a thorough inspection and treatment of the entire space with a licensed pest control professional.

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Eliminating Infestations

Cleaning, disinfecting and eliminating hiding places is the most effective method of ridding your retail space of bedbugs and other pests. However, many pests are able to live for several months without food and water, so it may be advisable to use a pesticide. To protect the health of employees and customers, work with an exterminator on the following:

- Choose the least toxic pesticide available that will be effective. Stronger-than-necessary chemicals could harm your customers and staff.
- Follow all manufacturer instructions for pesticide use.
- Advise staff to stay away from treated areas until the recommended time period has elapsed.

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- Treat furniture and cloth surfaces with pesticide only if necessary, and only in small amounts on the seams.

Your Liability

For liability purposes, thoroughly document your pest mitigation process, and swiftly resolve all identified infestations. If a customer does pursue litigation, weigh the cost of settlement against lost business and damaged reputation carefully. An infestation can be ruinous for brand image.