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Bed bug infestations continue to impact North Iowa and the U.S.

(Mason City) — The Cerro Gordo County Department of Public Health is recognizing Bed Bug Awareness Week (June 4-10, 2017) by ensuring residents know what to do should they suspect bed bugs in their home. Bed bugs are becoming much more common place, and residents need to know how to identify and differentiate between bed bugs, and other bugs.

“Bed bugs are a problem, nationwide, in cities big and small. To address the problem, we must collaborate with residents, property managers, lodging entities, multi-family housing units, laundromats, schools, shelters, health agencies, etc. It’s not just a housing problem; the impact of bed bugs is multi-dimensional”, said Jenna Willems, Healthy Home Program Coordinator with the Cerro Gordo County Department of Public Health.

Bed bugs are oval, wingless insects that reach about ¼ inch in length. They have flat bodies that are reddish-brown in color, and are the size of an apple seed or smaller. They may sometimes be mistaken for ticks or small cockroaches. Bed bugs can survive for months without feeding.

Bed bugs can live in any area of the home and can reside in tiny cracks in furniture as well as on textiles and upholstered furniture. They tend to be most common in areas where people sleep and generally concentrate in beds, including mattresses, box springs, and bed frames. Bed bugs can also reside in curtains, the corners of dressers and other furniture, cracks in wallpaper, and inside the spaces of wicker furniture. Dirty living conditions do not cause bed bugs, however it makes them much more difficult to remove.

Bed bug bites typically appear in rows or are concentrated in one area. They tend to resemble mosquito or flea bites. Reactions may vary and can include itching and swelling. Bed bugs are not known to carry or transmit disease.

There are many ways to detect the presence of bed bugs. The most effective method is a visual assessment. Check for the actual bug, their droppings or eggs, or fecal staining on walls. Bed bugs are known to leave a dark brown or reddish fecal spot on bed linens, mattresses or walls near the bed. They have glands that emit an odor that has been described as musty raspberry or coriander-like that may be noticeable in heavy infestations.

Should you discover you have bed bugs, there are many treatment options.

1. Contact a pest control company. Experts can assist you in determining the appropriate treatment options and if larger items should be disposed of or treated.
2. Heat is the best treatment. Bed bugs die temperatures greater than 120° F. You can do this by applying the highest heat setting on your washer and dryer, or by utilizing professional services.
3. Discard items. This is typically not necessary, however if you do discard an item please do responsibly. Wrap item in secure plastic sheeting to prevent spreading them elsewhere in the house, and label it with a sign reading “BED BUGS”.

Other options to temporarily manage bed bugs or limit the severity of an infestation may include:

- Active or passive interceptor traps
- Mattress or box spring encasements
- Silica gel or desiccant dusts
- Vacuuming (with removable bag) and cleaning

Being educated to recognize and avoid an infestation is the best way to prevent them from being introduced into your home. When traveling and staying in hotels, pull back the bedspreads, sheets and mattress pad to examine the mattress for signs of a bed bug infestation. If you suspect they are present, contact the hotel staff. If you suspect you have them in your home or that you have been exposed, launder clothing as soon as it is brought back into the home, inspect and thoroughly vacuum suitcases, or personal belongings, repair cracks in walls, and caulk windows and doors. In cases where you suspect bed bugs are present, do not move potentially infested furniture to a different room or choose to start sleeping in a different room of the home—you will risk spreading the infestation.

Another home for bed bugs can be used items. Individuals should be cautious and inspect items when purchasing or bringing used items (i.e. online, garage sales) into the home. Lastly, we encourage employers to think proactively and create an organizational or departmental policy to protect their establishment and employees from contracting bed bugs in the workplace.

Willems says, “Awareness of bed bugs is key to prevention and prevention is critical because the effects of bed bugs aren’t just physical, they are mental, societal, and economic as well. The more the community and residents know about bed bugs the more we as a community will be able to protect ourselves from these pests.”

For more information on bed bugs and how to prevent or treat an infestation, visit our website at www.cghealth.com or call Jenna at 641-421-9339.

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