



Treating Bed Bugs: Recommendations for Homeowners

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What's the problem with bed bugs and pesticides?

Over the past 20 years, more and more homes, hotels, schools and other settings have been affected by bed bugs. This has been happening across the country and in Vermont, too. At the same time, there have been many more reports of people being exposed to harmful levels of chemicals due to spills and misuse of pesticides to treat bed bugs. From 2006 to 2010, the National Pesticide Information Center received reports of pesticides being misused to treat bed bugs that resulted in 129 mild or serious health effects, including one death.

Bed bugs are not a health hazard, but pesticides used to treat them can be.

Bed bugs can be a big pest in the home, but they are not a health hazard. Bed bugs do not spread disease. Bed bug bites mostly cause red or white itchy bumps on the skin. However, misuse of pesticides to get rid of bed bugs can be dangerous for you, your family and pets.

USE EXTREME CAUTION when using pesticides to treat bed bugs.

There are many things to consider in managing a bed bug situation, including the life cycle and habits of bed bugs. If chemical treatment (pesticides) is part of the overall management plan, DO NOT MISUSE pesticides. Non-chemical treatments – such as steam cleaning, heat treatments, vacuuming and laundering – should be used in combination with chemical treatments to limit the amount of pesticides used in the home. The Health Department recommends that you hire a licensed, experienced pest management professional (applicator) to treat your home.

If you hire a professional applicator:

- *Check* with the Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets that the applicator is currently licensed and certified to apply pesticides in Vermont:
- <http://npic.orst.edu/mlrDetail.html?lang=en&to=SPE&state=VT#statePesticide>
- *Check* references. Treating bed bugs is difficult. Make sure the applicator has experience in dealing with these situations.
- *Make sure* that the applicator provides a comprehensive strategy for eliminating the bed bugs in all areas of your home.
- *Reduce* the need for pesticide applications by combining with non-chemical treatment methods such as cleaning, laundering and heat treatments.
- *Check* with the Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets that the pesticide being used in your home is registered for use in Vermont: <http://www.kellysolutions.com/VT/pesticideindex.htm>
- *Read* and understand the label of product to be used by the applicator.

If you apply a pesticide without professional help in your home:

- *DO NOT USE foggers* (or “bug bombs”). They are not effective against bed bugs.
- *Buy only* pesticides that are labeled, have an EPA registration number *and* are in the original unopened containers.
- *Never use* a pesticide labeled for outside use inside your home.
- *Make sure* the pesticide you are using is registered for use against bed bugs in Vermont. Check with the Agency of Agriculture: <http://www.kellysolutions.com/VT/pesticideindex.htm>
- *Read, understand and follow* all instructions on the product label. Not following the label instructions can harm the health of your family, your pets, and you. It can also result in contamination of your home, which can be expensive and time consuming to clean up.
- *If you have questions* about how to mix or dilute a product based on the label, be sure to get proper instructions.
- *Do not apply* pesticides to beds or furniture unless the label allows it.
- *Do not apply* pesticides repeatedly or in excess of label directions. More is not better and may be unsafe for your family.
- *Do not use* other household chemicals such as kerosene, rubbing alcohol, or bleach for pest control. These can be dangerous to health, and can cause fires or explosions.

If you think you have been overexposed to a pesticide, or feel sick after a pesticide has been used in your home, call the poison control center (800-222-1222) or your doctor immediately.

MORE INFORMATION –

Vermont Department of Health

800-439-8550 (in VT)

www.healthvermont.gov/prevent/bedbugs

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention Health Advisory: Misuse of Bed Bug Control Chemicals

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/HAN/han00336.aspx>

Northern New England Poison Center

1-800-222-1222

EPA Registered Products for Homeowners

<http://cfpub.epa.gov/oppref/bedbug>

Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets

AGR.Agrichemical@state.vt.us

802-828-2430

National Pesticide Information Center

1-800-858-7378

<http://npic.orst.edu/pest/bedbug.html>