Healthy Communities VT

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HOW TO TALK TO CALLERS ABOUT BED BUGS

An adaptation of the document of the same title published in 2008 by
Allison Taisey, Carolyn Klass, Jody Gangloff-Kaufmann

New York State Integrated Pest Management www.nysipm.cornell.edu
July 2008

https://nysipm.cornell.edu/sites/nysipm.cornell.edu/files/shared/documents/talk-to-callers-about-bed-bugs.pdf

Rick Castillo

(802) 829-1344 ~ rick.castillo@me.com ~ www.healthycommunitiesvt.org

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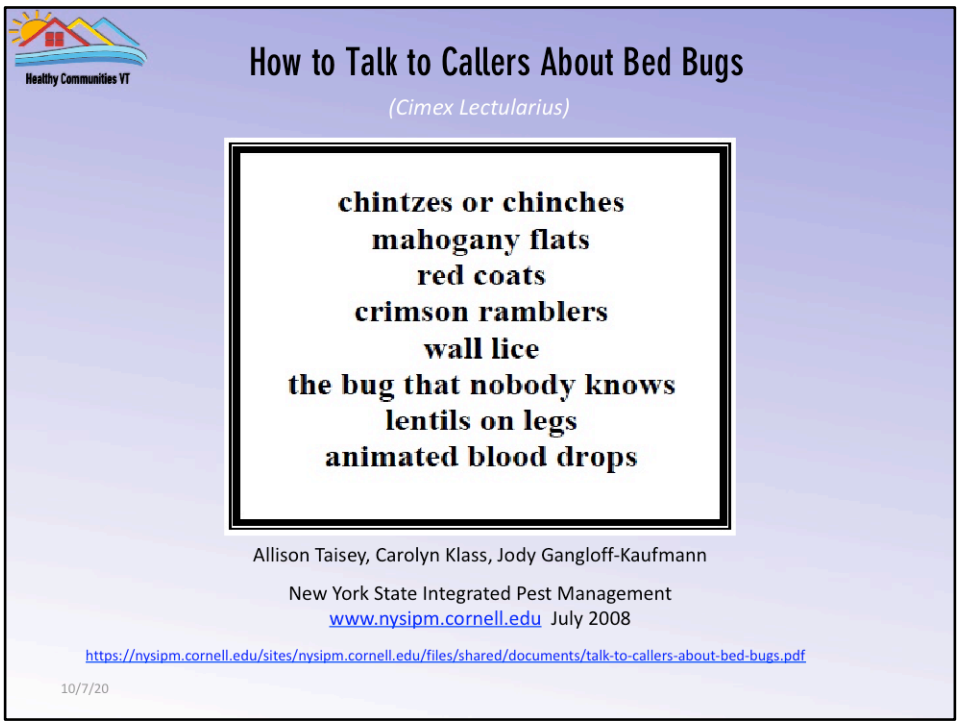
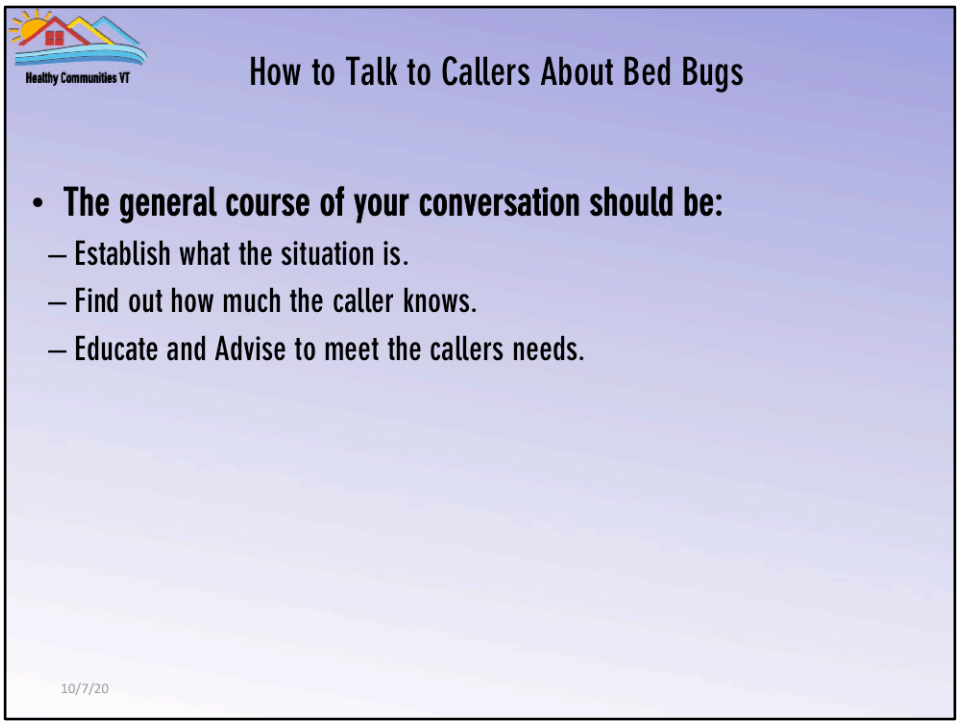


The slide above is from the title page of a PDF document from the New York State IPM program that provides the basics of integrated bed bug management—inspection, identification, control, and prevention, however, there have been changes based on newer research since the document was published in 2008. Also note that the information presented in the original document about legal issues and about pesticide use is general and not state-specific.

Please consider this document you are currently reading as a work in progress as we update the legal issues and human services content to reflect current Vermont legal interpretations and best practices. This document attempts to update and make Vermont specific only the legal and human services aspects of how to actually talk to callers about bed bugs from the NY State IPM Program. This document does not reference any of the potentially outdated aspects of integrated bed bug management—inspection, identification, control, and prevention from the 2008 NY State IPM Program document.

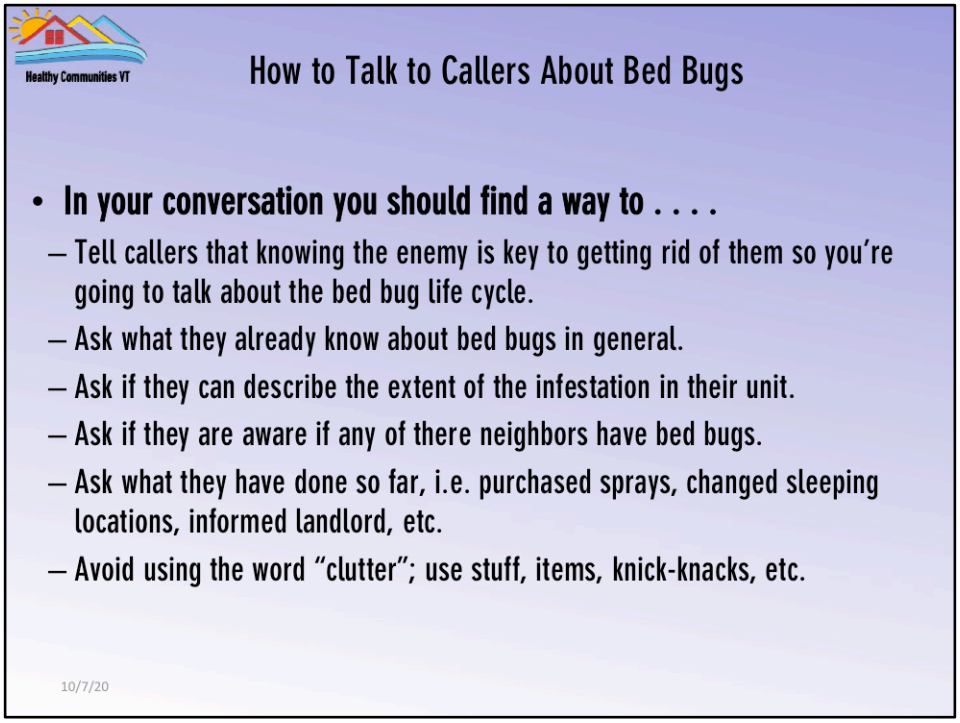


"Callers may be convinced they have bed bugs before they seek your advice. If not, they're being wonderfully proactive and should be applauded. Callers who've already found bed bugs must have a sample for identification." They can capture a bed bug, take a picture of it next to a penny, put it in a baggie, put it in the freezer, and contact a professional like the State Entomologist.

Judy Rosovsky
State Entomologist

Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets
163 Administrative DriveRandolph Center VT05061

802-279-2212 judy.rosovsky@vermont.gov



Tell callers that knowing the enemy is key to getting rid of them, so you're going to talk about the bed bug life cycle. Dealing with bed bugs requires thorough preparation. If callers understand why it is important, they're more likely to do the out-and-out preparation required to get rid of bed bugs.

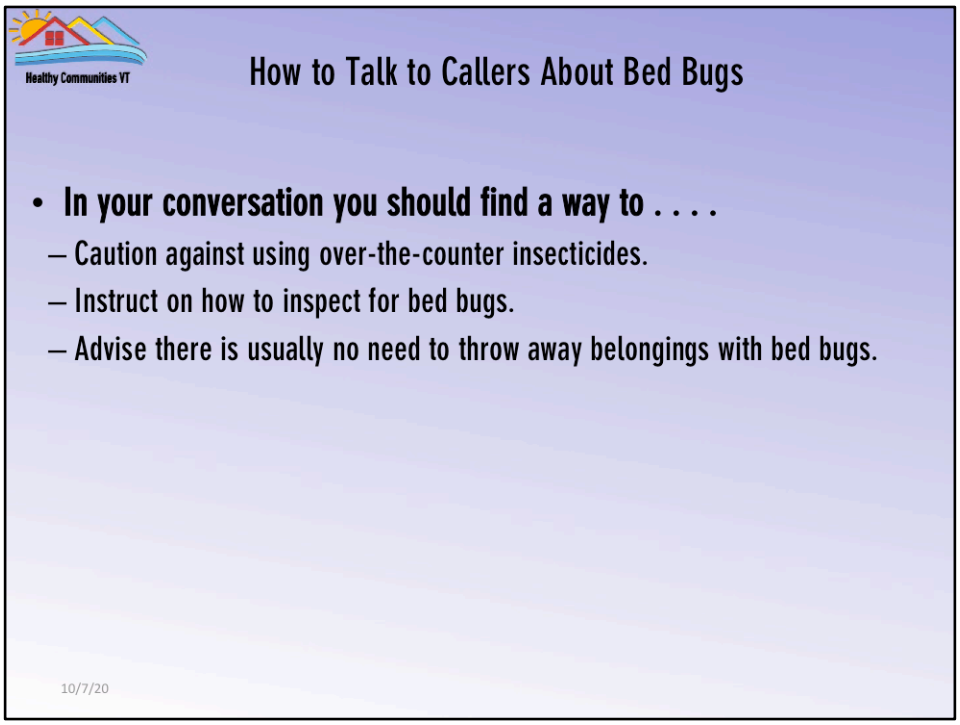
Ask callers to tell you what they know about bed bugs in general already.

Ask callers if they can describe the extent of the infestation in their home.

Ask if they are aware if any of there neighbors have bed bugs.

Ask what they have done so far to control the pests to establish what the current situation is.

Avoid using the word "clutter" since even the cleanest room will require extensive preparation and the caller may already feel insecure. At least describe what you mean by clutter. You don't want to propagate the belief that bed bugs are associated with hoarding or filth. Instead, talk about stuff, things, items, piles, knick-knacks, etc. or discuss specific items and areas.



Over-the-counter insecticides rarely eliminate bed bugs—they sometimes cause them to spread into other rooms. Because labels vary state-to-state you can't endorse any product.

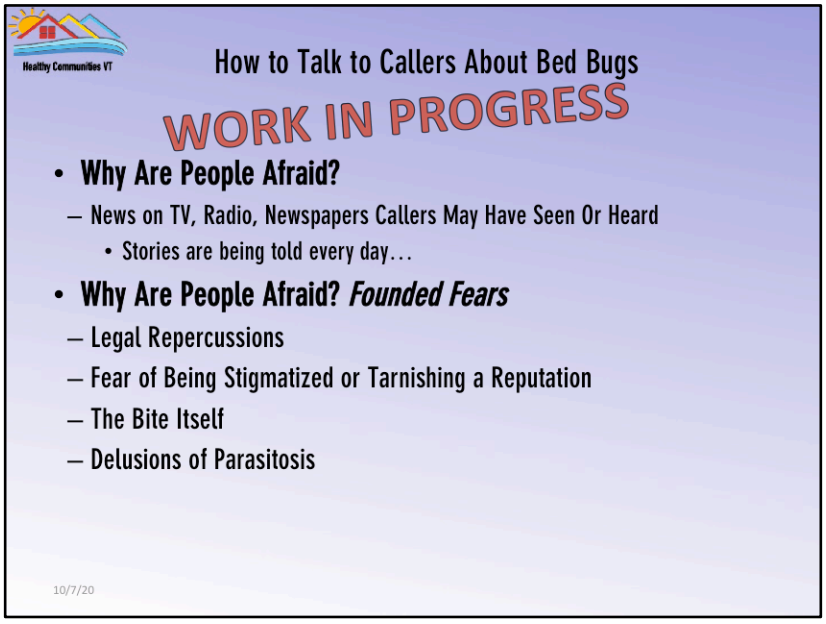
If the bugs spread to other rooms to find new hiding spots or to other units in the building because the resident used a fogger then it makes it harder for pest control professionals (PCPs) to target them.

Instructions on how to inspect can be found here:
https://www.epa.gov/bedbugs/how-to-find-bed-bugs

Here is a video from BedBugCentral on how to inspect a bed for bed bugs:
https://youtu.be/yGYbkjKnoag

BedBugCentral, https://www.bedbugcentral.com , is a great source of information on bed bugs

BedBugCentral has many good instructional videos on their Bed Bug TV site:
https://www.bedbugcentral.com/tv



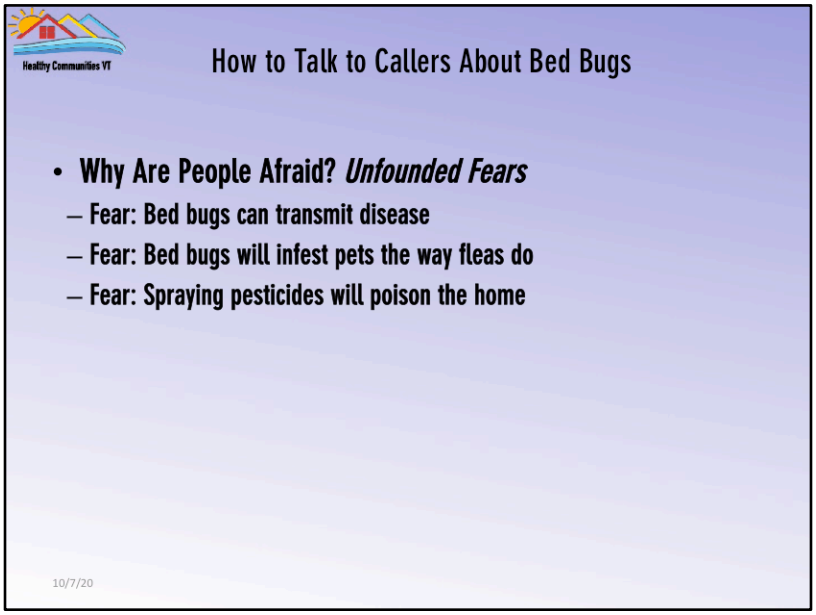
Legal Repercussions: Many people have been in lawsuits over bed bugs since they came back into the limelight in the late 1990's. It's usually hard to identify who's technically at fault because bed bugs can enter a space in any number of ways. The laws differ by state and are constantly being revised as the problem grows. Tell them: bed bug problems won't just work themselves out. Left untreated, they will spread.

The best way a caller can cover all bases is to inform all who are potentially involved *early on—landlord, property manager, neighbors, friends… Take steps to solve the problem: Call the local health department, code enforcement, or town health officer to find out what regulations apply. Contact Vermont Legal Aid if you feel you are being wrongly evicted due to a bed bug infestation. Document everything.*

Stigma: People worry what friends, family, and neighbors will say if their problem becomes known. Bed bugs aren't associated with filth or social status, but many people think they are. Sometimes in the most extreme cases of stigmatization tenants suffer from denial of badly needed home visiting and transportation services.

Infestations get out of hand by trying to keep them secret. Do-it-yourself products can drive bed bugs into neighboring rooms, making the problem harder (and costlier) to tackle when a PMP gets involved. Not warning other people robs them of the chance to avoid bringing bed bugs into their homes and businesses. Remember before you toss any furniture —treat, then destroy before putting them on the curb. Live insects or eggs may drop off while moving things from one place to another—best to get rid of the bed bugs and then decide what to trash.

The Bite Itself : You can't describe the bites as looking only one way. Some people don't react at all. On the opposite extreme, others get itchy welts that take two weeks to heal. Bites can occur singly, in clumps, or in a line. Bites can show up within hours—or two weeks later. Confirming an infestation on bites alone is impossible. You need evidence: cast skins and blood spots or the bugs themselves.



Fear: Bed bugs can transmit disease
Bed bugs aren't known to pass on disease. Although they can carry at least 24 pathogens, none (including HIV and Hepatitis) have been transmitted in the laboratory or (to the best of our knowledge) the field.

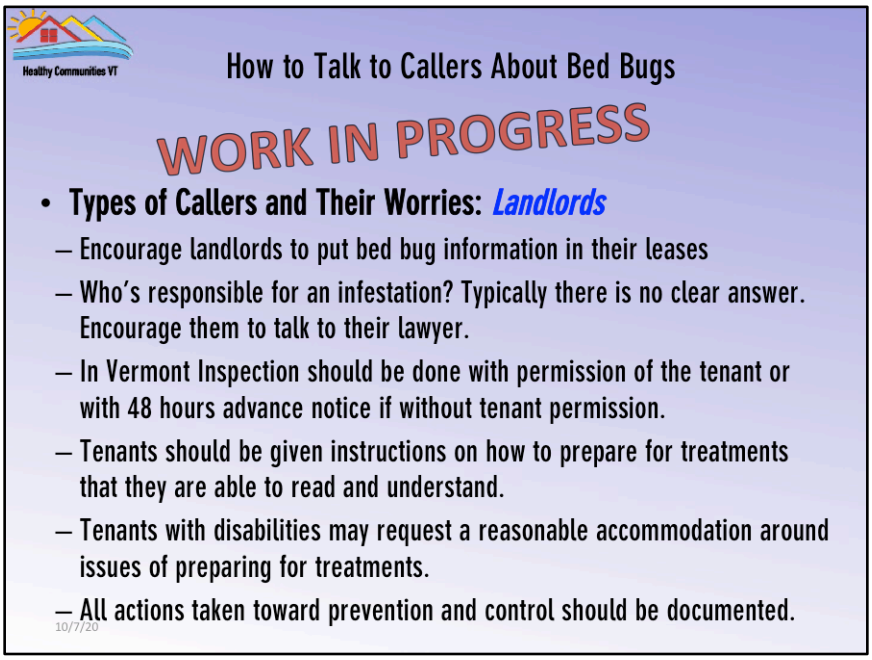
Fear: Bed bugs will infest pets the way fleas do
Bed bugs *can* feed on pets. A pet could carry a bed bug from one room to another. The bugs might get caught in a pet's hair, but they won't live on pets the way fleas do. Bed bugs rarely feed for more than 10 minutes and their feet don't grip onto hair. Twenty minutes of grooming outside lets you rest at ease.

Fear: Spraying pesticides will poison the home
This fear can be a challenge in getting a caller to consider having the landlord and pest control professional (PCP) treat their unit. A good PCPshould use more than just insecticides in a bed bug treatment.

Gone are the days of the "exterminator." Most formulations used in pest control today have little residual effect. It's not great for pest control, but is done with the well being of the family and the environment in mind. A licensed PCP should use only labeled formulations at proper dilutions and should *FOLLOW THE LABEL*.

Tenants, landlords and PCPs will work *together* to fight bed bugs, so they need to be honest with each other.

Clients have the right to know what's being applied in their home and at what concentration. EPA Reg. numbers are on the label. Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS*)* are available online for the active ingredient for all products (and often from the pest control company). If callers are worried about children, the elderly, pregnancy, ill people, or pets, a doctor or veterinarian can use the EPA Reg. # and MSDS to tell them what precautions to take. The National Pesticide Information Center (NPIC) can also be accessed by phone ((800) 8587378) or internet (npic.orst.edu). A pest control company should also have standard operating procedures for sensitive cases

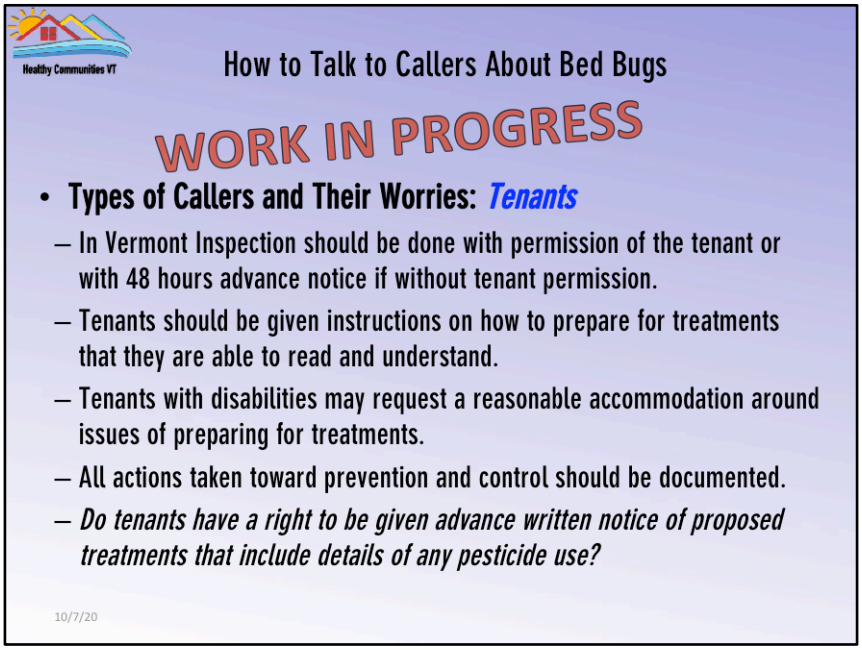


The question, "Who's responsible for a bed bug infestation?" has no clear answer. Laws are changing and every situation is different. Local health departments and law offices have the best answers to these questions. It's nearly impossible to place blame for a bed bug infestation in a large building, and no one is safe from bed bugs.

Encourage landlords to talk to their lawyer and include information on bed bugs in their leases as a preventative measure. For example, "residents will prepare their living units for visits by pest control professionals (PCP) according to guidelines supplied to them by building management and/or the PCP." The PCP should treat all rooms or units that share a wall (including directly above and below). The cooperation of every person involved will be essential. Having a plan ready can save time, frustration, and money.

Inspection should be done (with permission) often. Tenants may have frequent visitors and some units may exceed occupancy requirements. If tenants are breaking laws or lease obligations, it's not likely they'll seek help from the landlord or a pest control company, so proactive measures must be taken. Such cases can be difficult. Safety is always the #1 priority. Bed bugs aren't known to spread disease. Advise landlords not to put themselves or PCP in danger on account of bed bugs. Anyone who inspects apartments must be cautious of sharp objects or weapons under mattresses or in furniture. They should always look with a flashlight before touching.

ALL actions taken toward prevention and control in a unit should be documented. This helps prove that precautions were taken and helps PCPs evaluate the situation.



Tenants need information on bed bugs in their leases as much as landlords do. Tenants are entitled to a livable, safe and sanitary apartment. Encourage them to check their lease for the landlord's commitment to treating adjacent units (if applicable) and paying for the treatment if bed bugs are present in two or more units in the building. Planning ahead can save time, frustration, and money.

Tenants need to know how to inspect and prepare for treatment but responsibility for a pest control contract and involving the neighbors in a building-wide treatment plan is the landlord's responsibility. Thoughtful communication between all parties is essential.

The question, "Who's responsible for a bed bug infestation?" typically has no clear answer. Local health departments, town health officers and legal aid offices have the best answers to these questions. It's nearly impossible to place blame for a bed bug infestation in a large building, and no one is safe from bed bugs.

ALL actions taken by tenants toward prevention and control in a unit should be documented. These can help prove that precautions were taken and will help professionals evaluate the situation.

Welcome to the Connecticut Coalition Against Bed Bugs (CCABB) web-page.

This is a public service web-page, where peer reviewed information about bed bugs is published. The intent of CCABB is to provide practical, unbiased information about how to manage bed bugs and with that, reduce public anxiety and stigma.

Always keep in mind, that bed bugs are opportunistic. It is no one's fault when bed bugs are discovered. When people communicate and cooperate (especially with early reporting) and work together, bed bug activity can be quickly stopped. It is when people succumb to stigma, anxiety, and fear that quick effective management of the insect is impeded.

https://portal.ct.gov/CAES/Publications/Publications/Connecticut-Coalition-Against-Bed-Bugs-CCABB-Bed-Bug-Information