

# Bed Bugs and the Importance of Cloverleaf Inspections

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## BED BUGS LOVE TO TRAVEL

Bed bugs have a knack for ruining an otherwise excellent vacation. The number of bed bug complaint calls increases every year and a large percentage of those calls are a result of travel, particularly during the spring and summer months. Bed bugs are commonly found in hotel rooms or in a home, often after travel.



## CLOVERLEAFING

Cloverleafing is a term used in the pest management industry to describe the process of inspecting a room or apartment of concern and then branching out from that core room/apartment to the neighboring rooms or apartments. It's essential when inspecting for many pests, but particularly cockroaches and bed bugs. Should bed bugs be found in Room 314 at your hotel, they didn't necessarily come from Room 314. And they won't necessarily stay in Room 314. Cloverleafing means we'd inspect Room 312 (next door), Room 316 (next door), and ideally Room 214 (below it), and Room 414 (above it), and 313 (across from it). Inspecting all the connecting rooms of the room of concern will ensure that we'll find the source and make sure the bed bugs are not encroaching on other rooms.

## WANDERING, HIDING, AND HITCHHIKING

The practice of cloverleafing stems from insect behavior. It acknowledges that infestations spread and that often the source of the infestation is not where the initial problem is detected. It is both proactive and reactive pest management and is vital to ensure a complete inspection was made. Bed bugs, like cockroaches, prefer to remain concealed during the day. Their hiding places can include parts of the bed (including the mattress, headboard, and head frame), but is not limited to the bed. Baseboards, furniture, electrical switch plates, frames, etc. are all prime locations for a bed bug to wait for its next meal.

### What are we looking for?

- Live bed bugs (adults and nymphs)
- Dead bed bugs
- Cast skins (moltings) of bed bugs
- Bed bug eggs
- Bed bug feces

### Where are we looking?

- Beds (mattresses, frame, head board)
- Night stand
- Lights / alarm clock
- Baseboards
- Upholstered furniture
- Curtains

### Hitchhiking Bed Bugs Catch a Ride On

- Suitcases
- Pillows
- Purses/briefcases
- Shoes
- Stuffed animals
- Housekeeping carts

Clothing, suitcases, purses, and bags are also great hiding places and these are particularly troublesome as these items move from location to location, potentially moving bed bugs – hitchhikers – along with them. Most bed bug infestations start because bed bugs hitchhiked on a personal belonging (often a suitcase) from one place to another. Basic biology tells us that you need a male and a female to mate, so how much trouble can one bed bug be? Well, unfortunately, if it's a mated female that's hitchhiking (and they often will to avoid further mating which can be painful), she will hitchhike with all her fertilized eggs, which she'll lay her eggs in her new home. Those babies (nymphs) will then mate with each other and her, further infesting the area.



Bed bugs are known to travel many yards from their hiding place to their human host. But, that's not their preference. A hiding place closer to the human is preferred, but not always possible. In addition, bed bugs may wander in search of food (a human blood meal), dispersing from the original location. This means that bed bugs found in Room 314 may have actually come from Room 316, and that the bulk of the infestation is in Room 316. The bed bugs will be attracted to the carbon dioxide we expel while breathing, as well as our body heat. They'll seek us out based on those cues. And due to the shared components of a hotel or multi-housing property, it's easy for the bed bugs to travel from point A to point B to find those humans.

In contrast to cockroaches, poor sanitation is not a factor of bed bugs. Even the most clean hotel or apartment is susceptible to infestation because the bed bugs will hitchhike and travel from one place to another. Anyone can introduce the bed bugs, whether it be a tenant, an occupant, a vendor, an inspector, etc. Cleanliness isn't a factor because they're not hiding in garbage or attracted to food. They're attracted to humans and don't live on the body unlike some parasites such as lice.

## **PROACTIVE CONTROL**

Bed bugs are a challenging pest. There are many obstacles to controlling infestations, but the most effective way to control them is through early and proactive identification. If Room 314 was inspected and treated, but a cloverleaf inspection was not performed, we run the risk of missing out other key pockets of infestation. With an on-going infestation, Room 314 may even be re-infested. Room 316 may be a hotbed of activity, yielding hitchhikers that hop onto a cleaning cart and end up in Room 201, starting a whole new infestation.

Now, a cloverleaf inspection does not necessarily mean a cloverleaf treatment. The inspection serves to identify where the bed bugs are. A cloverleaf treatment doesn't make much sense unless the pest management professional (PMP) is finding bed bugs in all the rooms that were inspected. This is an important issue to distinguish between, as treatment costs can often be prohibiting. A reputable pest management professional would not recommend treating rooms unless there was evidence of infestation. Thorough proactive bed bug cloverleaf inspections by an experienced pest management control company are essential for identifying and controlling bed bug infestations.