



Kansas RTAP Fact Sheet

A Service of the Kansas Rural Transit Assistance Program — for Transit Agencies



Fighting Infestations of Bed Bugs in Public Transit

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Introduction

A bed bug infestation on a public transit vehicle can negatively impact the desirability of using public transit services. This fact sheet discusses how transit agencies can tackle the issue of bed bugs by familiarizing themselves with what bed bugs are, how bed bug infestations occur, and having procedures for handling bed bug incidents.

Bed Bug Recognition and Biology

Transit agencies are encouraged to provide training on identification of bed bugs and their basic biology. This will help staff members recognize bed bugs when checking areas prone to inhabitation. This knowledge can lead to early detection of bed bugs.

Bed bugs are insects that consume blood to survive. Bed bugs are egg shaped, flat, and approximately the size of an apple seed. Their color ranges from brown to brownish-red. They have wings but cannot fly, so they crawl. Bed bugs, on average, live four to six months. An adult female bed bug lays approximately 200 – 500 eggs in her lifetime in batches of 10 - 50. The eggs take six to ten days to hatch. Bed bugs can survive up to a year or longer in ideal environments. Because of this, bed bug infestations should be treated immediately after detection to minimize spreading throughout the vehicle and/or to other vehicles via passenger transfers.

Bed bugs are typically found in mattresses, box springs, and bed frames, but can travel from an affected home to public transit in clothing, purses,

luggage, and backpacks. Bed bugs prefer to hide in crevices and cracks of furnishings. Bed bugs do not have claws, therefore can easily fall off the clothing of an infected individual and easily cause an infestation on a public transit vehicle.

Instructions for Washing Infested Laundry

Remind staff members that it is extremely important to wash all their clothes and to use a dryer to kill the bed bugs. Set the washer and the dryer to the hottest possible temperature and dry clothes for longer than 30 minutes. It is also recommended that the entire wash load be repeated a second time. While this may take some time, it will ensure that the bed bugs are eliminated properly.

Procedures of Handling Bed Bug Infestations

Transit agencies are encouraged to create specific procedures and trainings to enable staff members to respond quickly to reports of bed bug sightings. A sample procedure can include the following steps:

1. A bed bug sighting is reported by a passenger or staff member. The individual reporting the sighting should be assured by staff members that the issue will be investigated. All reports of bed bug sightings should be taken seriously and addressed

immediately. These reports should not be dismissed without proper inspection of the reported vehicle. The vehicle should be checked and, if there are signs of bedbugs, action should be taken without delay. That may include removing the vehicle from service.

2. The reported vehicle should immediately be evaluated by a professional exterminator to verify the presence of bed bugs to determine the extent of infestation. Only a qualified professional should be given this task to ensure the bed bug infestation is addressed properly.
3. The professional will recommend a treatment for the infestation. Treatments may include, but are not limited to, the application of insecticides, heat treatments, and vacuuming.
4. Follow-up treatments should be administered to all reported vehicles in regular intervals until there are no further sightings of bed bugs. It is recommended that records be kept of bed bug infestations, so high-risk vehicles and routes can be identified.

Prevention of Bed Bug Infestations

Public transit vehicles should be inspected, at minimum, on a weekly basis and treated for pests, at minimum, on a quarterly basis. Vehicles with upholstered seats, carpeting, or with a history of bed bugs, should be actively monitored. If possible, upholstered seats should be replaced with plastic seats for ease of maintenance and thorough cleaning.

To protect employees from the risk of spreading bed bug infestations to their own cars or homes, encourage employees to bring a minimal number of personal items to the vehicles. Also, encourage employees to place their work clothing in a plastic bag before entering their homes and to immediately put the clothing in the washer. If possible, transit agencies should provide bags that deteriorate when the bag of clothes is placed

in the washer and washed at high temperature. This allows employees to change from their work clothes while still at work, put their work clothes in the bag, take them home, and directly put their clothes in the washer without risk of infecting their cars or homes. [See “Instructions for Washing Infested Laundry” on Page 1.]

Johanna Lambert of Rooks County Transportation takes a proactive approach to preventing bed bug outbreaks on their public transit buses. “If we are aware that an individual has a bed bug outbreak, we have that individual sit in the same seat and give room between them and other passengers. We then clean the bus and specifically the seat the same day and the next day. When we clean that seat, we get into the webbing of the safety harness. If the bed bugs are little, they may look like grains of sand.”

Because Rooks County is a public transportation service, riders cannot be turned down. Because of this, Lambert is extremely cautious about other riders who may not have the capacity to manage an outbreak. “We have transported people who have bed bugs and it is essential that we don’t allow it to spread on our vehicles because so many of our riders are elderly and cannot physically or financially manage a home infestation. Once a person has an outbreak in their home, it can cost several thousands of dollars and a complete overhaul of belongings to remediate the situation.”

Conclusion

Bed bug infestations can hurt the reputation of a transit provider and cause infestations beyond the vehicle itself. Because of this, transit agencies should be proactive about handling the issue. Take proactive measures to train staff members on how to spot bedbugs, conduct routine and frequent inspections, and respond immediately if bedbugs are found.

Sources for this Article

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