

Health Concerns about Misuse of Pesticides for Bed Bug Control

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are alerting the public to an emerging national concern regarding misuse of pesticides to treat infestations of bed bugs and other insects indoors. Some pesticides are being applied indoors even though they are approved only for outdoor use. Even pesticides that are approved for indoor use can cause harm if over applied or not used as instructed on the product label.

ATSDR warns that outdoor pesticides should not be used indoors under any circumstances. Homeowners and applicators should always carefully read the product label to make sure that:

- * it has an EPA registration number**
- * it is intended for indoor use**
- * it is effective against bed bugs (the label should say it is meant to be used to treat your home for bed bugs)**
- * you know how to properly mix the product (if a concentrate) and where and how to apply it safely within the home.**

Consumers should also be aware of recent cases where licensed and unlicensed pest control applicators illegally sprayed outdoor pesticides indoors to control bed bugs. In some cases, these pesticides were found at levels that harmed or could have harmed people's health. In some cases, residents were relocated until their homes could be decontaminated.

Preventing Exposure to Pesticides

1. Make sure you are treating the right pest. Many pests look alike. Before using any pesticides, confirm that your infestation is actually from bed bugs. Some products are specific to an insect, and won't work if used on any other insect.
2. Do not use pesticides indoors if they are intended for outdoor use. The label on the product will tell you whether it can be used indoors.
3. Use a pest control expert if you hire someone to treat your home for a pest problem. Treating bed bugs is very challenging. If you choose to hire someone to treat your home, an experienced pest management professional can help you treat the infestation effectively
4. If you buy over-the-counter pesticide products to apply yourself, be sure
 - * the product is in unopened, original pesticide containers
 - * the containers are labeled, and
 - * the containers have an EPA registration number.

If you feel you have been overexposed to a pesticide or feel sick after a pesticide has been used in your home, consult your doctor or a poison control center (1-800-222-1222) immediately.

5. ALWAYS FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS ON THE PRODUCT LABEL. The label will tell you which bugs the product will kill, how to mix the product, and where and how to apply the product.

Treating an infestation: Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

How can bed bugs be treated safely?

Like lice infestations, bed bugs are best treated using a combination of practices, such as inspection, monitoring, reducing clutter, using physical barriers, and carefully applying pesticides if needed. This type of comprehensive pest control strategy is called integrated pest management? (IPM). This approach includes vigilant activities by homeowners and renters, such as:

- * checking luggage and clothes when returning from a trip or buying second hand clothing, mattresses, or furniture;
- * thoroughly inspecting infested areas and the surrounding living space;
- * reducing clutter where bed bugs can hide; installing encasements on box springs, mattresses and pillows, and using interceptors under bed posts and furniture legs;
- * aggressively cleaning infested areas and clothing, in conjunction with professional heat/steam or cold treatments of baseboards and other belongings;
- * carefully using pesticides approved for indoor use on bed bugs (see <http://cfpub.epa.gov/oppref/bedbug/> for a list of EPA-approved pesticides), or hiring pest management professional.

DO NOT USE BLEACH in areas where you have treated your home with a pesticide. Bleach can convert some pesticides to more toxic forms that could result in harmful exposures to your family. See the following links and for more information on how to effectively treat bed bug infestations:

- * **Environmental Protection Agency:** <http://www.epa.gov/bedbugs>
- * **National Pesticide Information Center:**
<http://www.npic.orst.edu/pest/bedbug.html>

Important phone numbers and Web sites

If you believe you or a family member has become ill from a pesticide exposure: Call your local poison control center: 1-800-222-1222, your local hospital emergency room, or the National Pesticide Information Center at 1-800-858-7378. You can also call the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Information Line at 1-800-CDC-INFO for information about pesticides.