

HEALTH ALERT

Dear Parents:

School/Classroom:

Date:

Over the past few years, tiny, blood-sucking insects called **bed bugs** have made their way into homes in Greenwich and many other American communities. Most recently a couple of bed bugs have been sited in our school. Schools are not the ideal locations for bed bugs to reproduce, because they are nocturnal insects that require feeding prior to reproduction. Here's what you need to know about the bugs and most important, how to get rid of bedbugs if your home becomes the target of an invasion.

Bedbugs are reddish, flat, oval-shaped insects that feed on the blood of humans and other warm-blooded animals. They're most likely to set up house in places with a high turnover of residents, such as hotels, motels, assisted-living facilities, and apartment buildings. Inside, they live and lay eggs in mattresses, in crevices, in bed frames, behind paintings or photographs, in closets, and in couches or other wooden or upholstered furniture.

Bedbugs hide during the day and feed at night. The good news is that bedbug bites are not usually harmful. In a review study on bedbugs in the Journal of the American Medical Association, researchers report that no study to date has proved that bedbugs can transmit or carry disease. Some people, however, will develop a reaction, similar to a mosquito bite.

What to do: If you suspect that your home has been infested with bedbugs, contact a licensed pest control operator to see if the problem truly is bedbugs. If you do have bedbugs, the professionals may use various pesticides, such as sprays, dusts, or powders to exterminate your home.

In addition:

- Place all your clothes, bedding, and other fabrics into the dryer for 45 minutes in high heat (over 140°).
- Clean your home as thoroughly as possible, and reduce clutter to minimize the places the bedbugs can hide.
- Vacuum your furniture, focusing closely on crevices
- If possible, take apart bed frames and vacuum them separately. Place the legs of beds in dishes of water to prevent bedbugs from crawling onto the bed from the floor.
- You may also purchase a special encasement to cover your mattress -- this will trap bugs inside and keep them from biting. However, if it is opened or ripped the bugs may escape.
- Getting rid of bedbugs can be difficult but it's not impossible. With patience, the help of an exterminator and some diligent cleaning and washing, you will most likely be able to put the problem to rest for good.