

Don't Let the Bed Bugs Bite: What You Need to Know

What are bed bugs

Bed bugs are small (adults are approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in length), wingless, blood-sucking insects that feed upon warm-blooded animals. Adult bed bugs are straw-to-reddish-brown in color. Bed bugs grow in size after a taking a blood meal. Bed bugs are most active at night, and generally feed on sleeping hosts.



How do bed bugs become a problem?

In addition to being very tiny, bed bugs' bodies are flat and ovular in shape, allowing them to hide easily in cracks and crevices, such as those in bed frames and mattresses. Bed bugs are able to survive for long periods of time in between feedings and can be transported easily among locations as stowaways on furniture, luggage, and bedding. Bed bugs are also able to travel between adjoining rooms via cracks in the walls and openings made for pipes and wiring.

What are the health risks?

Bed bugs do not transmit diseases to humans. Bed bugs painlessly feed on their host, injecting a tiny amount of saliva in the process, which can result in mild to severe allergic reactions. Many people do not react to bed bug bites. Excessive scratching of these bites is highly discouraged as it can lead to secondary infections. Antihistamines and corticosteroids can be prescribed by a doctor and used to reduce allergic reactions and inflammation.

What are some indications of bed bug infestation?



- Complaints of bug bites during the night.
- Blood spots on bedding materials.
- Reddish, brown fecal spots on bedding materials.
- A strange, sweet-smelling odor.
- Egg casings or shed skin on bedding materials.
- Bed bugs and/or eggs found in cracks and crevices of bedding, desks, dressers, beneath loose wallpaper, or in the pleats of curtains.

How is a bed bug infestation confirmed?

The best way to confirm a bed bug infestation is to look. A visual inspection should include removing the sheets from the bed where bed bugs are suspected.

- Look for bloodstains on the mattress.
- Fold back the seam and look under the seam for active bugs or bug bodies.
- As bed bugs molt they leave the old exoskeletons behind, it can easily be seen with the naked eye.
- Examine the under side of the mattress.
- Additional areas to inspect include: where wallpaper is peeling, cracks in the wall, box springs, bed frame crevices, and headboards. If a small crack is present, push a straightened paper clip into the opening to see if any of the bugs crawl out.

Bed bugs don't jump so it is unlikely that if you do identify bed bugs in a rental unit that they will get on your clothes. If bugs are found have a professional exterminator confirm infestation.

What should be done if a bed bug infestation is confirmed?

Management depends on the extent of the bed bug problem. Individual mattresses and box springs can be encased in covers. Pesticides can be used in the home to treat small-scale infestations. However, resistance may develop in response to these chemicals and there are a number of human health risks associated with pesticide use. High-suction vacuuming or steam treatments have been found to be effective. Heating linens to 140°F for 30 minutes in a dryer can be effective in destroying heat-sensitive bed bugs. Crevices should be sealed with caulking and loose wallpaper should be repaired or removed. In the case of a widespread infestation, professional extermination is recommended. If the infestation occurs in a rental property a professional exterminator should be recommended and the exterminator should do a follow up inspection to confirm the elimination of the infestation. The exterminator should be asked to provide some documentation to the town health officer stating that repeat inspection found no evidence of infestation.



How can bed bug infestations be prevented?

Individuals should be encouraged to be wary of any type of furniture, mattress, or clothing left on the street to be discarded. Items bought at garage sales should be inspected and cleaned carefully before being brought into the home. Luggage should also be inspected after travel. The avoidance of clutter is important in order to reduce the number of hiding places for bed bugs.

Additional resources

- <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7454.html>
- <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/bedbugs>
- http://www.nysipm.cornell.edu/publications/bed_bugs/files/bed_bug.pdf

Bibliography

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- http://www.nysipm.cornell.edu/publications/bed_bugs/files/bed_bug.pdf