

Bed Bug Information

What are bed bugs?

Bed bugs are small insects that feed on human blood. They are usually active at night when people are sleeping.

Adult bed bugs have flat, rusty-red colored oval bodies, no wings and are about the size of an apple seed. They are big enough to be easily seen, but hide in mattresses, box springs, bedding, cracks in furniture, floors, or walls. When bed bugs feed, they swell and become brighter red. They can live for several months to over a year without feeding. They don't jump or fly, and they crawl and move about the same speed as an ant.

How do I know if my home has bed bugs?

Look for signs of an infestation that may include:

- Itchy skin welts on your body
- Small blood smears on bedding from crushed insects
- Tiny dark spots on your sheets, mattress or box spring which are their fecal droppings
- Dried remains of shed bed bug skins

Be aware that other insects, such as fleas, ticks, and mosquitos, can leave bites that look like bed bug bites. Bites alone cannot prove you have a bed bug infestation.

Important note: The only way to be sure you have a bed bug infestation is to find and positively identify a live bed bug.

If you suspect you have bed bugs, you will have to conduct a thorough search of your home. Bed bugs are hard to find because they hide in, under, and around beds. They also hide inside, under and behind furniture, and in small cracks or corners in furniture, floors or walls or in carpeting close to where they feed at night.

Newly hatched bed bugs are about the size of a poppy seed, pale yellow in color, almost transparent, and very difficult to see. Once they have fed, they become larger and are red or brown in color which makes them easier to see. Bed bug eggs are white and about the size of two grains of salt. When laid, they are cemented to surfaces making them difficult to remove.

What do bed bug bites feel and look like?

A bed bug bite is painless and some people have no reaction to the bites at all. Most people have itchiness, red spots, or welts that look like mosquito or flea bites hours later. There may be an itchy bump but the tiny bite mark may not be visible. These usually fade after several days. A few people have severe allergic reactions.

Important note: Bites are only a clue that you may have bed bugs, but you can't tell from bites alone that you have a bed bug problem.

Bed bugs usually bite at night while you are asleep. If you wake up in the middle of the night and find a bug on your bed, don't squash it - instead, completely seal a live sample in a clean zip-style sandwich bag and have the bug identified by a pest control operator.

Are bed bugs dangerous?

Bed bug bites are a nuisance and annoying, but bed bugs are not known to spread diseases. Try not to scratch bites because it increases the risk of skin infections. If you have a severe reaction to a bed bug bite, see your doctor.

How do bed bugs get into homes?

Bed bugs are not a result of poor housekeeping. Anyone can have bed bugs. People bring bed bugs into their homes unknowingly in infested luggage, backpacks, purses, furniture, bedding, shoes or clothing. They can also travel between apartments through cracks in walls and floors.

Total release pesticide foggers or 'bug bombs' can force bed bugs into adjacent apartments. DO NOT USE: 'Bug Bombs'. They do not control bed bugs and using 'bug bombs' improperly can be dangerous and spreads pesticide throughout your home.

If you have bed bugs and live in a rental property, notify the property manager immediately. Do not use pesticides to treat for bed bugs yourself. "General use" pesticides are not effective against bed bugs and their use may cause the bed bugs to spread to adjacent units.

Where do I look?

Bed bugs can hide anywhere but usually close to where people sleep. Find bed bugs early by inspecting your bed and bedding each time you remove the sheets for washing. Check around the edge of the mattress and box springs, in seams and under buttons and tags. Remove the thin cover material on the underside of your box springs, a common hiding place, and look inside. If you have a headboard, footboard or bed frame, carefully inspect the corners, cracks and screw holes for bed bugs.

Bed bugs can hide in nearby bedroom furniture, baseboard heaters, window sills, curtains, nightstands and dressers. Remove the drawers and look inside in corners, in cracks, screw holes, and under each piece.

Important note: Using a flashlight and 10x magnifying glass can help to spot the small bugs in dark, tight areas.

Check upholstered furniture, sofas, and recliners. Look under cushions and the skirt of upholstered furniture. Turn upholstered furniture upside down and carefully look at the underside for signs of bed bugs. Look behind pictures and wall hangings. Inspect curtains or other window coverings.

Bed bugs can hide under carpet edges where carpets meet walls; if necessary, pull up the edge of wall-to-wall carpeting. Examine loose wallpaper, cracks in plaster and walls. Inspect window and door casings, moldings. Bed bugs may hide behind baseboards and wood trim moldings. It may be necessary to remove these moldings to find hidden bed bugs.

Inspect throw rugs, electronics (TVs, radios, clocks, computers, CD players, DVD players) and especially clutter (books, papers, magazines, clothes).

What do I do if I think I have bed bugs?

MAKE SURE TO REPORT IMMEDIATELY as bed bugs proliferate rapidly! Bed bugs are very difficult to get rid of because they are hard to find and kill. Making your home bed bug-free will take time and effort from you; your landlord; and a pest control company.

The best way to eliminate bed bugs is early detection, regular cleaning and inspecting, and targeted pesticide use or heat treatment by a pest management professional. This includes regular cleaning and vacuuming, steaming to kill bed bugs, laundering and drying clothes on high heat, and precisely applied pesticides directly on bed bugs. Bed bugs are killed when they are sprayed directly; sprays that have dried are not very effective. Pesticides should only be used by Licensed Pesticide Control Operators (PCO).

How can I prevent infestations?

- Change your bedding, pick up clutter, clean and vacuum and at least twice a month. Weekly is even better. Look for bed bugs while you clean especially around the edge of the mattress and the box spring. A careful inspection of these areas will help prevent bed bugs from becoming established and catch infestations early. An early infestation is easier and cheaper to treat than an established population of bed bugs.
- Check all used items you bring into your home carefully for bed bugs and eggs. Inspect all used furniture, mattresses or box springs, bedding, and used clothing and books. Remember: eggs and the immature bed bugs are very small and easily overlooked.
- Stay clutter free. Remove boxes and other stored items in bedrooms. Keep your bed bug-free by keeping it away from walls. Keep bedding from touching the floor and keep clothing and other items off the bed.
- Clean regularly and eliminate hiding places. Seal cracks, crevices, and hiding places. This will also discourage movement of bed bugs from one place to another. Repair and seal cracks in plaster, walls, and baseboards; repair or remove loose wallpaper.

Other helpful hints:

- If you use interceptors (traps), inspect them regularly to see if there are trapped bed bugs.
- If you buy a new bed, covering the new mattress and box spring with new encasements and placing interceptors under the bed legs will help prevent possible infestations in the future.

How can I keep bed bugs out of my home?

When you travel, ask your hotel about their bed bug inspection policy. Inspect your hotel bed as soon as you arrive - lift off the bed sheets, and check sheets and mattress edges for bugs or dark fecal dropping spots. If you see any signs, inform the hotel. Consider moving to another room or changing hotels.

Immediately after trips, wash clothing and inspect luggage and shoes. Thoroughly vacuum luggage inside and out before storing. Use a dry scrub brush to remove bed bug eggs that may be present. You can also seal the luggage in a plastic bag for at least a year. Any eggs or bed bugs hidden in the luggage will hatch and the bed bugs will die without feeding.

Inspect and clean used furniture, clothing and books for bed bugs before bringing it into your home. Don't take home discarded bed frames, mattresses, box springs, or upholstered furniture.

<http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/ehs/bedbugs.aspx>