

Bed Bugs FAQ

What are bed bugs?

Bed bugs are insects that, as adults, have oval-shaped bodies with no wings. Prior to feeding, they are about 1/4 inch long and flat as paper. After feeding, they turn dark red and become bloated. Eggs are whitish, pear-shaped and about the size of a pinhead. Clusters of 10-50 eggs can be found in cracks and crevices. Bed bugs have approximately a one-year life span during which time a female can lay 200-400 eggs depending on food supply and temperature. Eggs hatch in about 10 days.

What do bed bugs feed on?

Bed bugs prefer to feed on human blood, but will also bite mammals and birds. Bed bugs bite at night, and will bite all over a human body, especially around the face, neck, upper torso, arms and hands. Bed bugs can survive up to one year without feeding. Both male and female bed bugs bite.

Can I get sick from bed bugs?

There are no known cases of infectious disease transmitted by bed bugs. Most people are not aware that they have been bitten but some people are more sensitive to the bite and may develop a localized reaction. Scratching the affected areas can lead to infection.

How do bed bugs get into my home?

Bed bugs are often carried into a home on objects such as furniture and clothing. If a bed bug problem is suspected, use a bright flashlight and look closely to check for live bed bugs or shells in the following areas:

- Seams, creases, tufts and folds of mattresses and box springs
- Cracks in the bed frame and head board
- Under chairs, couches, beds, dust covers
- Between the cushions of couches and chairs
- Under area rugs and the edges of carpets
- Between the folds of curtains
- In drawers
- Behind baseboards, and around window and door casings
- Behind electrical plates and under loose wallpaper, paintings and posters
- In cracks in plaster
- In electronic devices, such as telephones, radios, and clocks
- Bed bugs can also travel from apartment to apartment along pipes, electrical wiring and other openings. If the infestation is heavy, a sweet smell may be noticed in the room.

What can I do if I have bed bugs in my home?

The best method to deal with bed bugs is Integrated Pest Management (IPM), which combines a variety of techniques and products that pose the least risk to human health and the environment.

1. Inspect your mattress and bed frame, particularly the folds, crevices and the underside, and other locations where bed bugs like to hide.
2. Use a nozzle attachment on the vacuum to capture the bed bugs and their eggs. Vacuum all crevices on your mattress, bed frame, baseboards and any objects close to the bed. It is essential to vacuum daily and empty the vacuum and dispose contents into a sealed garbage bag immediately.
3. Wash all your linens in the hottest water possible and place them in a hot dryer for 20 minutes. Consider covering your pillows and mattress with a plastic cover.
4. Remove all unnecessary clutter.
5. Seal cracks and crevices between baseboards, on wood bed frames, floors and walls with caulking. Repair or remove peeling wallpaper, tighten loose light switch covers, and seal any openings where pipes, wires or other utilities come into your home (pay special attention to walls that are shared between apartments).
6. Monitor daily by setting out glue boards or sticky tape (carpet tape works well) in places where bed bugs were seen. Closely examine any items that you are bringing into your home.
7. If you feel you have an infestation, consult with a professional pest control service to confirm you have bed bugs and discuss options that pose the least risk to humans and the environment.
8. After all pest control measures are carried out, you may continue to see some living bed bugs for up to ten days. Repeat measures may be required to address the hatched eggs that have survived. This is normal. Discuss this with your pest control professional to decide whether follow up measures are necessary.

What do bed bug bites look like?

When bed bugs bite people, they inject their saliva into the biting area, causing the skin to become irritated and inflamed. Like many insect bites, individual responses to bed bug bites will vary. The bites from bed bug may go unnoticed, or be mistaken for flea or mosquito bites or other skin conditions. Bed bug bites most commonly occur on exposed areas of the body, including face, neck, hands, arms, lower legs or all over the body.

Four types of skin rashes have been described in the literature:

- The most common rash is made up of localized red and itchy flat bites. The classical bed bug bites could appear in as bites in a row referred to "breakfast, lunch, and dinner".
- In rare cases, people may develop large raised, often itchy, red welts.
- In people with high sensitivity to bed bug saliva, people may develop a lump filled with blood or fluid.

How do I prevent bed bugs from entering my home?

Although even the cleanest homes and hotels can have bed bugs, regular house cleaning, including vacuuming your mattress, can help to prevent an infestation. Clean up clutter to help reduce the number of places bed bugs can hide.

Be careful when buying used furniture or clothes. Make sure to inspect the used item, and feel free to ask the retailer if the items were checked for bed bugs.

Use caution when bringing home used furniture or clothes from the curb side. These items may be infested with bed bugs.

Are there travel precautions?

If you are concerned about bed bugs while traveling, you can do the following:

- Inspect the room and furniture: inspect all cracks and crevices of the mattress and box spring, and look for blood spots or live insects. Request a different room if you find evidence of bed bugs.
- Protect your luggage: keep all belongings in your luggage and wrap your luggage in plastic to help prevent bed bugs from entering your luggage. Keep luggage on the shelf or away from the floor.
- Protect the bed: if possible move the bed away from the wall, tuck in all bed sheets and keep blankets from touching the floor.
- Upon returning home: keep your luggage in an isolated area of your home, such as the garage. Inspect the luggage. Wash all your clothes in the hottest water possible and put them in a hot dryer for 20 minutes.

Where to find more information

For more information call a professional pest control service or ask to speak to a public health professional. Call Health Connection at 705-721-7520 (1-877-721-7520).