

If I Find Bed Bugs, What Should I Do?

If you have found and confirmed bed bugs in your home, follow these simple steps.

DO NOT:

Do Not panic. Remember that these pests are not life threatening. It is likely that they have been present for some time. They reproduce quite slowly, so you have time to organize and develop a logical yet aggressive treatment strategy.

Do Not assume that they are present because of uncleanliness or poor housekeeping. These are parasites of people and may be found wherever people live.

Do Not automatically discard furniture or other items. This is often unnecessary and moving furniture often leads to spreading bed bugs.

Do Not purchase or use chemicals that are not labeled for Bed Bug control. Home remedies and concoctions are likely to have little effect on the bed bugs but can have detrimental health effects on you, your family or your home.

DO:

Remain calm. Know that bed bugs, although difficult to control, can be eradicated from your home if you follow a well thought out and executed plan.

Inspect and monitor. Determine where and how widespread the infestation is. Use of traps such as Climb-Up Interceptors® is an efficient method of monitoring.

Intensify cultural practices. Clean, launder, vacuum, remove clutter. Do not move furniture from room to room. Maintain good travel practices. Remember that just like you would not want others to bring them into your house, be sure that you give others the same respect. Use steam treatments, mattress encasements, and inorganic powder treatments as part of your treatment strategy.

Contact a professional pest manager who has experience in controlling bed bugs using integrated pest management. Work closely with them in preparing the home for treatments and in following up afterwards. Researchers have found that how residents work and cooperate with the pest control provider can make the difference between an easy eradication and a long drawn-out process.

What Can I Expect From A Pest Control Professional?

First, understand that control of an infestation can be difficult and will require time. Professional pest managers are trained to apply treatments that involve heat or pesticides. During the control process, total cooperation from the resident or homeowner is needed. A pest management professional will inspect to determine the location of the infestation and how large it is. Bedding and infested materials should be laundered at the time of treatment and on a regular basis afterwards, using hot water, soap, and hot temperature clothes dryers. Stuffed animals, backpacks, and shoes can be treated the same.

How Can I Help Get The Bugs Out?

Non-chemical treatments are often also necessary to eliminate the infestation whether used alone or in conjunction with professional chemical control methods. These are often best applied by the homeowner or resident. Two excellent non-chemical methods are (1) using mattress and box spring encasements and (2) using steam machines. Encasements are designed to fit around a mattress or a box spring. They are zippered shut and will contain bed bugs that are located inside. They also will prevent bed bugs from entering the mattress. Encasements improve control and reduce the risk of spread, but they will not eliminate an infestation, especially if bed bugs are located in any other place. Steam machines and heat treatments are effective for killing bed bugs. Reduce clutter to improve detection and treatment effectiveness.



Encasements installed on box spring and mattress



Freshly laundered mattress pad and bed clothing are put on over the encasement

5/2011

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BED BUG BITS AND BITES

What Do Bed Bugs Look Like?

Adult bed bugs are approximately 1/4" long and are red-brown in color. They are similar to the size, shape and color of an apple seed except that they are very flat (if they have not eaten). They have very thin legs and antennae and have no wings. Immature bed bugs are similar to adults, except that they are smaller and are a lighter yellow-brown in color.



Bed bug adult

Where Are Bed Bugs Found?

Bed bugs are found throughout the world. They are closely associated with people and can live wherever people spend a lot of time, such as hotels, dorms, homes, apartment buildings, long term care facilities, schools and hospitals. Bed bugs are concentrated in areas where people sleep. Their flattened body shape allows them to hide in small nooks and crannies in the bed, the furniture where people may sleep, or areas very close by such as baseboards, electrical outlets, and even inside appliances.



Bed bug infestation on a night stand

How Do Bed Bugs Spread?

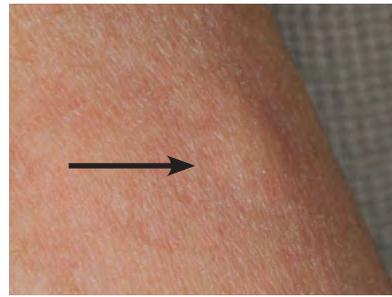
Bed bugs are excellent hitchhikers. They can easily move from an infested building to a new site as people move. The recent resurgence of bed bugs is due in large part to international travel. Bed bugs hitchhike on luggage or on personal items or clothing and can move from one country to another in a very short period of time. Within a community, bed bugs can spread when people move infested possessions into a new apartment or home. Purchasing infested, second-hand beds or other furniture has been shown to accelerate local outbreaks of bed bugs. Once inside a building bed bugs can move between rooms or apartments by walking or crawling via hallways, or by squeezing through tiny cracks in common walls, ceilings, or utility ports.



Bed bugs squeeze into folds and crevices of mattresses, box springs, and stuffed furniture

Do Bed Bugs Hurt Me?

Bed bugs feed on human blood. They take blood from sleeping people by inserting their mouthparts through the skin and sucking out small portions of blood. Bed bug feeding has not been proven as a means of transmitting diseases, however recent research has shown that bed bugs can carry drug resistant bacteria (MRSA) on their bodies. At the very least bed bug feeding is a disagreeable process. Bed bugs feed on exposed skin (neck, arms, legs, etc.) while a person is sleeping. Reaction to the bites varies widely from person to person. Bed bug feeding does not cause immediate pain, so it does not disturb sleep. It is usually only in the morning that people may feel the effects of the bite. For most people, a bed bug bite results in a small, itchy, red, welt similar to a mosquito bite. Some people express more itching and swelling, while others manifest no skin reaction to bed bugs bites at all and therefore are not even aware of an infestation. The most serious result of bed bug feeding is the emotional anguish that is associated with this parasite. The thought of a bed bug feeding on a sleeping person can translate into sleeplessness or into obsessive behavioral compulsions that can be worse than the bed bug bite.



Bed bug welt on skin after a bite



Bed bug engorged after a blood meal

How Do I Know If I Have Bed Bugs?

Usually, bites are the first sign of a bed bug infestation. Keep in mind, however, that there are other causes of welts and itching. People would do well to verify suspected bed bug bites by inspecting closely for the presence of the bugs themselves or the tell-tale signs that bed bugs leave behind. Use a flashlight to examine cracks and crevices where bed bugs may hide. Look closely for bugs in the sheets, or along the mattress seams, folds or in cracks in the bed frame. If a bug is found, place it in a small bottle and have an expert look at it to confirm that it is a bed bug. Signs of bed bug feeding also include tiny bloodstains or marks on the bed clothing, sheets, or mattresses. Often bed bugs will excrete a small droplet of blood after feeding. Look in or along mattress seams or other cracks and crevices on or near the bed for evidence of these dark fecal specks. Usually these occur where you might find live bugs or shed skins of bed bugs (cast skins).



Inspecting upholstered furniture with a flashlight



Collecting bed bugs from a mattress



Fecal specks are indications of a bed bug infestation

How Can I Prevent Bed Bugs From Entering My Home?

The most valuable form of home protection is becoming aware of the threat of bed bugs. Understand where and how they travel. Know what they look like and how to inspect for them. Be very careful about purchasing or bringing home second-hand upholstered furniture and clothing. Always closely inspect items for signs of infestation. Launder any items that can be laundered in hot soapy water and dry with hot air. Bed bugs will not survive this regime. Make vacuuming, cleaning, decluttering and inspecting a regular habit. Steam or heat treatments must be applied to anything that is suspect, before it enters the house.

How Do I Protect Myself From Bed Bugs While Traveling?

Be alert and aware when travelling. If you suspect bed bug infestations, use common sense and what you know about bed bugs to help avoid bringing them home with you. Inspect your hotel room for signs of an infestation **BEFORE** you move your belongings in. Some travelers will place their luggage in the bathtub or on a wooden chair or desk rather than on a bed while they perform this inspection. Carefully inspect the mattress seams, headboard, and furniture around the bed for fecal specks, cast skins, or live bed bugs. If bed bugs or signs of bed bugs are found, immediately report this to the registration desk and ask for a different room. When returning home, carefully check luggage seams and clothing for any signs of bed bugs before bringing it into your home. Clothing can be immediately washed and dried to ensure that no bed bugs will hitchhike on it. If other possessions and luggage are found to have bed bugs on it, do not take them into the home. Arrange for heat or other reliable treatment of the articles in question.