



Bed Bugs

What is a bed bug?

The common bed bug is a small, reddish-brown insect. Bed bugs are oval shaped with flattened bodies. The size of a bed bug is 5 to 7 mm long or 3/8 of an inch, usually no bigger than a lady bug.

Bed bugs feed on the blood of humans and animals to survive. Unlike some parasites such as fleas or lice, bed bugs do not live on their hosts but only visit them to feed. Bed bugs are most active at night. A bite is similar to being bitten by a mosquito, and it is painless and may result in a small, red, itchy bump. However, many people have no reaction at all.

Bed bugs can not fly and prefer to hide close to their hosts when not feeding. Bed bugs can live for up to a year without feeding. They can be found in homes, apartments, hotels, shelters, and student dormitories. Bed bugs can also hide on clothing or in luggage when you travel. These can be brought to places like your home or hotel.

Are bed bugs a health concern?

Bed bugs have not been shown to spread disease to people. Bed bugs are considered more of a nuisance than a health concern. However, public health officials maintain a level of concern due to the possibility of secondary infections. The main concern is the risk of infection from scratching the area of the bite. The reaction from the bite usually goes away within hours or days without treatment. Applying an antiseptic lotion or antibiotic cream to the area may help symptoms and prevent infection.

Symptoms of a Skin Infection

Symptoms of an infection may include:

- Pain, swelling, redness, or warmth around the area
- Red streaks extending from the area
- Pus draining from the area
- Swollen lymph nodes in the neck, armpit, or groin
- Fever or chills with no other known cause

Symptoms of an Allergic Reaction

Symptoms of an allergic reaction can range from mild and annoying to severe and life-threatening.

- Allergens can affect different tissues in the body, such as the eyes, nose, skin, lungs, and gastrointestinal tract.
- Some allergic reactions, such as hives or itching around an insect bite, affect only one area of the body.
- Other allergic reactions may affect the whole body, causing itching, swelling, or difficulty breathing.
- A severe allergic reaction (called anaphylaxis) can lead to shock and even death.

Allergic reactions do not occur the first time a person is exposed to an allergen. A person may become more sensitive to the allergen with each exposure.

If your symptoms cause concern or get worse, you should see your doctor or health professional.

How do I know I have bed bugs?

Although bed bugs can move quickly, you can find and collect one for identification.

During the day, bed bugs tend to hide close to where they feed – for example, where people sleep. Bed bugs do not have nests, but they do tend to gather and hide in certain places.

If bed bugs are present, there will be dark spotting and staining on your sheets, mattress, pillow, carpets, and clothing. The staining is from their excrement and blood from crushed insects when feeding.

You may also notice molted skins, excrement and eggshells where bed bugs hide. In severe cases, you may notice an offensive, sweet, musty odour from their scent glands.

Finding the areas where bed bugs hide also helps confirm areas in your home that need treatment. You should check or inspect the following areas:

- Check or inspect all furniture, especially bedroom furniture, including mattresses and box springs. Take the furniture apart for closer inspection and possible treatment if necessary.
- Check under and behind furniture such as chairs, couches and dressers. It may be necessary to remove the dust covers on chairs and couches. Pull drawers out of dressers and check the inside. Check under lamps on nightstands.
- Check cracks and crevices along baseboards and walls.
- Check torn or loose wallpaper, decorative borders, and behind paintings and pictures.

You may want to contact a pest control professional or your local health authority if you think there are bed bugs in your home.

How can bed bugs be prevented?

The best way to prevent bed bugs is to keep them out of your home in the first place. Ways to prevent bed bugs from entering your home include the following:

- Do not bring infested items into your home. Closely check or inspect your luggage and clothing and the luggage and clothing of your guests, especially after travel to other countries. Infestations can often be traced to international travel in Asia, South/Central America, Africa, and Europe.
- Even the cleanest homes and hotels can have bed bugs. However, regular housecleaning, including vacuuming your mattress, can help to prevent bed bugs. Clean up clutter to help reduce the number of places bed bugs can hide.
- Check second-hand furniture and bedding before you bring them into your home.
- Ensure cracks and crevices in the exterior of your home are repaired.
- Install or repair screens to prevent birds, bats or rodents from entering your home and serving as hosts for bed bugs.

How can I get rid of bed bugs?

There are non-chemical and chemical options for treating bed bug infestations.

Non-chemical ways to treat bed bugs include:

- Wash bedding and clothing in hot water and laundry detergent. Delicate clothing can be put in a bag and placed in the freezer for several days.
- Vacuum often with strong suction all possible places with bed bugs, including the mattress, box spring, and bed.
- Use a scrub brush to remove bed bugs and eggs from the seams of mattresses.

Stuffed toys can be put in the clothes dryer for 30 to 45 minutes.

Put small things like jewellery boxes, pillows, and stuffed animals in a dark plastic bag, and leave them outside in the hot sun for 2 or 3 days.

Chemical ways to treat bed bugs include:

- Spray, liquid, and dust products are available at retail stores. It is very important to ensure the products are registered specifically for bed bugs. Directions for use of chemical products should be followed carefully.

Pest control professionals:

- For larger infestations or for infestations in multi-unit buildings, pest control professionals should be called. Building owners should check municipal by-laws before trying to treat infestations on their own.
- Pest control companies often use chemical insecticides. More than one application will likely be necessary.
- Please refer to or contact a licensed pest control company in your area.

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