

Bed Bugs



After decades of virtually no reports, sightings or infestations, pest control professionals across the country are experiencing an upswing in the number of bed bug calls. Bed bugs have been around for hundreds of years and pestered Americans until the latter half of the 20th century when the use of the modern day insecticides became common. As a result, bed bugs became scarce here in the United States, but they continued to flourish in other countries. And that's where and how the current problem likely began. The increase and ease of international travel has provided bed bugs plenty of hosts (travelers) to ride with back to the States. Here are some answers to the questions commonly asked about bed bugs.

Actual Size: 1/4" to 5/8"

Why are they pests?

Bed bugs feed on the blood of humans and other warm blooded animals. These insects feed mostly at night when hosts are asleep, causing small, hard, swollen, white welts on the skin. The welts soon become inflamed and itch. Some people are bothered more by the bites than others.

Do they spread disease?

Bed bugs and their relatives are not known to transmit human disease. The welts they cause can itch severely.

How are they identified?

Adult bedbugs are reddish-brown to mahogany in color, oval shaped, and flattened. They vary from 1/4 up to 5/8 inch long. After a blood meal their body is swollen, more elongate, and appears to be more of a dull red color. They cannot fly but they do move quickly.

What is their growth and development?

Three or four eggs are laid per day over two months. That means with favorable conditions (temperatures of 70° F and with regular feeding on blood) each female bed bug can lay about 200 eggs. Eggs hatch in as few as 6 days or as long as 28 days, depending upon conditions. When bed bugs bite they inject a fluid into the skin that assists in obtaining blood. This saliva also causes the skin to become irritated and inflamed. It takes about three to five minutes for the bed bug to become engorged and then it crawls away to a hiding place in a crack or crevice to digest the meal. Bed bugs will seek more blood when they are hungry but they are easily capable of going two to eight weeks and in extreme cases up to a year without a blood meal. In situations where they are allowed to thrive there may be three or more generations a year.

If they feed at night, where are they during the day?

Bed bugs hide in cracks, crevices, and seams of bedding and furniture during the day. They prefer narrow crevices with a rough surface where their legs and backs touch both sides of the surface. Some common hiding spots include the crevices of upholstered furniture and mattresses created by folds, buttons, and cording; bed frames; dresser frames; cracks along and behind baseboards; behind pictures and in picture frames; loose wallpaper; drapery pleats; electrical outlets; window frames; door moldings; luggage; and just about any other narrow crack and crevice you can find in a room.

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What preparations are necessary for a treatment?

Prior to treating a room the bed linens should be removed and laundered. The floor and especially the perimeter along the baseboards should be thoroughly vacuumed. The closets need to be emptied and all the dresser drawers need to be emptied. The contents of the drawers and closets should be placed in large plastic bags (trash bags work well) and put in another room. Please consult our bed bug preparation notice for detailed instructions.

How is the treatment done?

The treatment needs to be extremely thorough. The sides, cording, and folds of the mattress and box springs are treated but the surface on which people sleep is not. Bed bugs do not hide on the surface of the mattress but in the crevices and folds. The bed framing and headboard need to be treated. Once that is done then the entire perimeter of the room and ALL the possible cracks, crevices, and hiding places need to be inspected and treated. Remember, bed bugs feed at night and then crawl away to nearby cracks and crevices to digest their blood meal. Often times other rooms where there is upholstered furniture, futons, hide-a-beds, etc. need to be treated. The treatment is extensive, time consuming, and expensive. After the treatment is completed allow the area to dry completely and ventilate the room before using the bed or other treated furniture. This may take four hours or longer. A follow up visit should be scheduled within seven to ten days.

Why are they so difficult to control?

The difficulty in control has to do with finding all the hiding places. The more clutter in a room, the more pictures and wall decorations, and the more furniture are factors that increase the number of places that need to be treated. Remember bed bugs have the ability to hide in the smallest crack or crevice and go unnoticed for several weeks.

How are they spread?

Bed bugs are hitchhikers. They grab a ride on luggage, baggage, furniture, bedding, boxes, and even clothing worn by people coming from infested sites.

Will we take them home with us?

If you are working in an infested room doing things like inspecting, painting, cleaning, vacuuming, etc, you are not going to take them with you. Recall that bed bugs hide in cracks and crevices during the day and search for a blood meal at night. Remember though that bed bugs are hitchhikers. They grab a ride on luggage, baggage, furniture, and bedding so be sure to inspect these items before they are removed from an infested home or apartment.

Will they spread to other suites or rooms in our building?

Bed bugs are capable of moving about in search of hiding places and a blood meal. Certainly, there may be some movement along common utility, plumbing, and cable lines in hotels, motels, apartments, and other multiple type dwelling places. More commonly bed bugs are spread between rooms by people sharing bedding, furniture, clothes, luggage, and other possessions. A good precaution to take once an infestation is identified is to treat the pipe holes, common plumbing and utility lines, and electrical outlets leading in and out of the room.

Is one treatment enough?

We have found that it is best to inspect and retreat the area seven to ten days after the initial control procedure. This allows time to evaluate the effectiveness of the process and reapply materials to the hard to reach areas. The need for additional treatments is determined by the amount of clutter, the number of hiding places, and the cooperation of the occupants. After the first treatment it is strongly recommended that the mattress and box spring be encased with zippered plastic covers. These covers are available from Target, Wal-Mart, Bed, Bath & Beyond, and the internet and cost anywhere from \$10.00 to \$40.00.

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