

Bites & Concerns



Bed bugs usually bite people at night while they are sleeping. They feed by piercing the skin with an elongated beak through which they withdraw blood. Engorgement takes about 3 to 10 minutes, yet the person seldom

knows they are being bitten. Bed bugs normally do not reside on people like head or body lice - immediately after feeding they crawl off and reside elsewhere to digest their meal. Symptoms after being bitten vary with the individual. Many develop an itchy red welt or localized swelling within a day or so of the bite. Others have little or no reaction and in some people the reaction is delayed. Unlike flea bites that occur mainly around the ankles, bed bugs feed on any skin exposed while sleeping (face, neck, shoulders, back, arms, legs, etc.). The welts and itching are often wrongly attributed to other causes, such as mosquitoes. For these reasons, infestations may go a long time unnoticed and can become quite large before being detected. The likelihood of bed bugs increases if the effected individual has been traveling, or had acquired used beds or furnishings before symptoms started to appear. Bed bugs are also suspected if you wake up with itchy bites you did not have when you went to sleep. It is important to recognize that not all bites or bite-like reactions are due to bed bugs. Confirmation requires finding and identifying the bugs themselves, which often requires the help of a professional.

A common concern with bed bugs is whether they transmit diseases. Although bed bugs can harbor pathogens in and on their bodies, transmission to humans is considered unlikely. Their medical signification is chiefly limited to the itching and inflammation from their bites. Antihistamines and corticosteroids may be prescribed to reduce allergic reactions and antiseptic or antibiotic ointments to prevent infection. Though not known to carry diseases, bed bugs can severely reduce quality of life by causing discomfort, sleeplessness, anxiety and embarrassment.

Throw Out The Bed?



Eliminating bed bugs from beds can be challenging. If there are holes or tears in the fabric, the bugs and eggs may be inside, as well as outside. There are also restrictions on how beds can be treated with pesticides. For these reasons, companies sometimes recommend that beds be discarded, especially when heavily infested or in poor condition. Another option is to encase both the mattress and box spring in a protective cover, available through retail outlets or pest control firms. Once the cover is installed and zipped shut, any bugs which happen to be inside are entombed and eventually will die. Encasements also help protect newly purchased beds and make it easier to spot and destroy any bugs residing on the outer surface during subsequent services. Encasements will not, however, keep bed bugs from crawling onto a bed and biting a sleeping person. Some companies treat seams, tufts and crevices of bed components with insecticides, but they usually will not spray bed sheets, blankets or clothing, which should be laundered. Vacuuming and steaming further help to eliminate bugs and eggs from beds, but afford no residual protection and may not kill bed bugs hidden inside the box spring or mattress. Fumigation is another way to de-infest beds and hard-to-treat items, but the procedure is not always available. In extreme cases, entire buildings have been fumigated for bed bugs. The service is costly though and involves covering the building in a tarp and injecting a lethal gas. Some companies also de-infest such items with specialized heating equipment.

Description and Habits



Bed bugs are small, brownish, flattened insects that feed solely on the blood of animals. The common bed bug, *Cimex lectularius*, is the species most adapted to living with humans. It has done so since ancient times.

Adult bed bugs are about 3/16" long and reddish brown, with oval, flattened bodies (see photo). They are sometimes mistaken for ticks

or cockroaches. The immature (nymphs) resemble the adults, but are smaller and lighter in color. Bed bugs do not fly, but can move rapidly over floors, walls, ceilings and other surfaces. Female bed bugs lay their eggs in secluded areas, depositing up to five a day and 500 during a lifetime. The eggs are tiny, whitish, and hard to see on most surfaces without magnification. Under favorable conditions (70-80°F), the bugs can complete development in as little as a month, producing three or more generations per year. Cooler temperatures or limited access to blood extends the development time. Bed bugs are resilient. Nymphs can survive months without feeding and the adults for more than a year.



Controlling Infestations

Bed bugs are challenging pests to control. Since they can hide in so many places, treatments must be thorough and elimination is not always a certainty. In most cases, it will be prudent to enlist the services of a professional. Experienced pest control firms know where to look for bed bugs and have an assortment of management tools at their disposal. Owners and occupants have an important role and will need to assist the professional. Affording access for inspection and treatment is crucial and excess clutter will have to be removed. Belongings strewn about rooms afford many places for bed bugs to hide and impedes inspection and treatment. Since bed bugs can disperse throughout a building, it often will be necessary to inspect adjoining rooms and apartments.

Infested and infestation-prone bedding and garments will need to be bagged and laundered (120°F minimum) since these items cannot be treated with insecticides. On items that can not be laundered ask your pest control professional for more information on ridding these items of bed bugs.

At times it may be necessary to throw out infested items, especially beds and upholstered furniture. Knowledgeable pest control firms are able to advise clients on what can stay and what should go. When infested items are discarded, bagging or wrapping them prevents dislodgement of bugs en route to the trash.