



Facts about 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. Bed bugs are 5-7 mm (3/8 inch) long or about the size of a ladybug.

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

How are bed bugs spread?

Bed bugs are not spread from one person to another. They feed off the person for 5-10 minutes at night, while they sleep, then drop off the person and crawl to a sheltered crevice. Bed bugs cannot fly and prefer to hide close to people when not feeding. Bed bugs can live for up to a year without feeding. They can be found in apartments, hotels, homes, shelters, and student dormitories. Bed bugs can also hide on clothing or in luggage when you travel and can be brought to places like your home or hotel.

Why are bed bug numbers increasing?

The increase in bed bug numbers may be due to changes in modern pest control practices. This includes the use of insect-specific baits and gels, which do not work for bed bug control. In addition, more people are traveling increasing the chance of bringing the insect back in their luggage.

Are bed bugs a health concern?

Bed bugs are more of a nuisance than a health concern. They do not appear to spread disease to humans. 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.

If your symptoms cause concern or get worse, you should see your health care provider.

How do I know if I have bed bugs?

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 routine 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 that have fed.

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 if you think you have bed bugs.

How can bed bug problems be prevented?

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

- 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 2 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.

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 specifically registered 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 bylaws before trying to treat infestations on their own.
- Pest control companies often use chemical insecticides. More than one application will likely be necessary.
- You can find pest control companies in your local phone book or by referring to www.PestControlCanada.com.

For further information, please call Health Links- Info Santé at 788-8200.

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