

# **Bed Bug Fact Sheet**

## **What are bed bugs?**

Bed bugs (*Cimex lectularius*) are small insects that feed on the blood of mammals and birds. They are often found near sleeping areas in the seams of mattresses, box springs, cracks and crevices in bed frames, and usually spread to gaps behind baseboards, pictures, wallpaper, and electrical outlets. They may hitchhike into a home on used furniture, clothing or other items brought from infested areas.

## **What does a bed bug look like?**

Adult bed bugs are oval, wingless and reddish-brown in color, with antennae and small eyes. They are visible to the naked eye, about the size of an apple seed (roughly  $\frac{1}{4}$  –  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch long) but often hide in cracks and crevices. When viewed from the side, their bodies are flat, which is why they can fit into such narrow spaces. When bed bugs feed, their bodies swell and become a brighter red. Newly hatched bugs are white or yellowish and resemble adults, but are smaller. Bed bug eggs are white, about the size of a pinhead ( $\frac{1}{10}$  inch long) and are found in crevices in clusters of 10-50 eggs.

## **Can bed bugs cause disease?**

Although bed bugs may be a nuisance to people, they are not known to spread disease. Typically, the bite is painless and rarely awakens a sleeping person. However, it can produce large, itchy welts on the skin. Welts from bed bugs do not have a red spot in the center-those welts are more characteristic of flea bites. Bed bugs feed at night for about 3 to 10 minutes before crawling off to a sheltered crevice. They will bite anywhere on the body, but especially on exposed areas such as the face, neck, arms and hands. The bites may itch for up to 2 weeks before healing, so resist the urge to scratch to prevent a secondary, bacterial infection. Wash the bites with soap and water to reduce the risk of infection.

## **How long do bed bugs live?**

The typical life span of a bed bug is about 10-18 months. They can survive for weeks to months without feeding.

## **How does a home become infested with bed bugs?**

In most cases, bed bugs are transported from infested areas to non-infested areas when they cling onto someone's clothing, or crawl into luggage, furniture or bedding that is then brought into the home.

## **How can I prevent a bed bug infestation in my home?**

Do not bring infested items into your home. It is important to inspect new and used furniture before bringing it inside by examining tight spaces along seams, around buttons and under cushions. When traveling, look for evidence of bed bugs, such as dark spots on mattresses from droppings, before unpacking. Run a hairdryer on high heat around baseboards, mattresses, picture frames for evidence of bed bugs. Place luggage in the porcelain tub to prevent hitchhiking or place in seal tight bags.

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## **How do I know if my home is infested with bed bugs?**

Unless an infestation is severe, you may not see bed bugs crawling out in the open. They prefer to hide in sheltered areas until they come out to feed, but you can find evidence of bed bugs. If you have bed bugs, you may also notice itchy welts on you or your family member's skin. You may also see the bed bugs themselves, small bloodstains from the crushed bed bugs, or dark spots from bed bug droppings in your home. Bed bugs often hide in or near beds and bedroom furniture, and in the tufts, seams, and folds of mattresses and daybed covers. In more severe infestations, bed bugs may spread to cracks and crevices in bed frames and box springs, behind nightstands, behind baseboards, window and door casings, pictures, and moldings, and in nearby furniture, loosened wallpaper, and cracks in plaster and flooring. Bed bugs may also hide in piles of books, papers, boxes, and other clutter near sleeping areas. Use a flashlight to look behind and underneath furniture and woodwork.

## **How can I get rid of bed bugs?**

If you suspect you have bed bugs, you will probably require the help of a professional pest control specialist. A careful inspection must be undertaken and all possible hiding places within infested and adjoining rooms examined. A professional can't do it alone. To get rid of bed bugs, you must remove clutter such as pictures, books and clothing from the infested area so there are fewer places for the bugs to hide. Vacuuming will remove some of the bed bugs, but the eggs are glued in place and can't be removed by vacuuming. When vacuuming, concentrate on mattress seams and around any tufts or buttons. Vacuum wherever your inspection revealed the presence of bed bugs-furniture, box springs, bed frames, floors and baseboards. Remove the vacuum bag immediately; place it in a sealed bag and dispose of it outdoors. Infested items such as clothing, shoes, bedding and blankets can be placed in a clothes dryer on high heat for 20 minutes to kill bugs and their eggs. Mattresses and box springs may be enclosed in bed bug- proof zippered cover to kill the bugs inside. The cover should remain in place for more than one year because bed bugs can survive a long time without feeding.

## **What about using pesticides?**

Infestations will usually require the use of pesticides in conjunction with the cleaning and vacuuming methods listed above. Chemicals are most safely applied by a licensed professional. Professionals have access to the insecticides most effective against bed bugs and are trained in their proper application. However, if you plan to use pesticides yourself, be sure to use products labelled for indoor use, apply only to areas listed on the label and always follow label instructions. Improper application of chemicals is dangerous and may even make the problem worse. For example, bug bombs are not effective and may scatter bed bugs to other rooms or neighboring apartments. Repellents such as DEET do not work against bed bugs.

## **Who do I contact to have a bug identified?**

If you find a bug and would like to have it identified, the Ohio Department of Health's Zoonotic Disease Program (ZDP) offers a free insect identification service. You may contact ZDP at: 614-752-1029 and press (option 1) for submission information.