

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 5-7 mm long or 3/8 of an inch – usually no bigger than lady bugs.

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. 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.

Bed bugs cannot 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 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.

Are bed bugs a concern in BC?

Reports of bed bug problems have been on the rise in BC. In larger urban areas in southwestern BC, reported cases have increased by 600 per cent from 2003 to 2005. The increase in bed bugs is thought to be the result of changes in modern pest control practices including the use of insect specific baits and gels, which do not work for bed bug control. In addition, more people are traveling abroad increasing the chance of bringing the insect back in their luggage.

Are bed bugs a health concern?

Bed bugs have not been shown to spread disease to humans. Although bed bugs are considered more of a nuisance than a health concern, 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.

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

How do I know I have bed bugs?

Although bed bugs can move quickly, if you can find them it should be fairly easy to 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 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 or your local health authority if you think you have bed bugs.

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:

- 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.

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.

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