

What Causes Bed Bugs

fact sheet

What are bed bugs?

Bed bugs are small insects that feed on human blood. They are usually active at night when people are sleeping. Adult bed bugs have flat, rusty-red-colored oval bodies and have six legs. Adult bed bugs are about the size of an apple seed and they are big enough to be easily seen. Bed bugs are not usually seen during daylight hours and most commonly come out in the middle of the night. They hide in cracks in furniture, floors, mattresses, walls or electronics. When bed bugs feed, their bodies swell and become brighter red. They can live for several months without feeding.

What does a bed bug bite feel and look like?

Most bed bug bites are initially painless, but later turn into large, itchy skin bumps. These bumps do not have a red spot in the center like flea bites. The bumps itch but usually go away after a few hours. Some people do not have reactions to the bites of bed bugs.

Are bed bugs dangerous?

While bed bugs are not currently known to spread diseases, their bites often cause itchy skin welts and can lead to secondary infections of the skin and lymph glands when scratching and irritation allows introduction of bacteria from the skin surface. Bed bug bites can cause an allergic reaction or digestive upset. Persons coping with bed bug infestations may also experience anxiety, insomnia and possibly other nervous system disorders.

Bed bugs are found in

Apartments, condos, houses, hotels, motels, restaurants, discarded mattresses & furniture, schools, colleges, hospitals, nursing homes, halfway houses, homeless shelters, correctional facilities, busses, taxis, movie theaters

How does a home become infested with bed bugs?

In most cases, people carry bed bugs into their homes unknowingly. Usually bed bugs arrive in infested furniture, bedding, clothing or luggage. Bed bugs may also travel between apartments through small crevices and cracks in walls and floors.

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

You may notice itchy skin bumps when you wake up. You may also see the bed bugs themselves or the bloodstains from crushed insects. Dark spots often appear on bedding from their droppings. It is often hard to find them because they hide during daylight hours in or near beds, other furniture, and in cracks around the bed.

How can I keep bed bugs out of my home?

Inspect used furniture for bed bugs before bringing it into your home. Never bring discarded bed frames, mattresses, box springs, or upholstered furniture into your home. Use a hot dryer first, then wash clothing and inspect luggage immediately after returning from a trip.

How can I keep my furniture from infesting someone else's home?

Never resell or donate infested furniture or clothing. If you throw infested furniture away, make it undesirable to others by cutting or poking holes in its upholstery or making it unusable. Tape or spray paint a sign to it that says, "infested with bed bugs."

Should I use a pest control company?

We recommends that homeowners hire pest control companies registered in your state to get rid of bed bugs. You can call a national firm such as Home Advisor for recommendations at (866) 214-8380. In an apartment complex, please contact the management or landlord for pest control services. When considering hiring a pest control professional, you should examine the following points:

- Use only licensed reputable, well known pest control companies.
- Be aware of what product the company is going to use and what the hazards are with its use. You should request the company give you an information sheet or label regarding the product used. Types of products available include poisonous liquids, poisonous dusts and non-poisonous dusts.
- Companies should follow up treatments. Bed bugs are hard to find and kill. A pest control specialist might have to return two or more times. Bed bug extermination is expensive. Do not assume that one treatment will solve the bed bug problem completely.
- What is the company recommending you need to do to help solve the problem? There are some basic routine steps you can take to help eliminate the bed bug problem.

The pest control company should:

- Hire only licensed pest management professionals with training on bed bug treatment. Ask to see a copy of their license or check with your State's Department of Agriculture.
- Inspect your home/apartment to confirm the presence of bed bugs.
- Find and eliminate their hiding places.
- Treat your home with special cleaning and/or pesticides if necessary.
- Make return visits to make sure bed bugs are gone.

Home treatments for bed bugs.

While the use of professional pest control companies is the ideal way to deal with the problem, it can be expensive. As an alternative, there are things that people can do on their own to help fix the problem.

Find out where bed bugs are hiding in your home.

Use a bright flashlight to look for bed bugs or their dark droppings in bedroom furniture, mattresses and anything within five feet of the sleeping area. A hot hair dryer, a thin knife, an old credit card or a playing card can be used to force them out of hiding spaces and cracks. Check:

- Behind your headboard.
- In the seams and tufts of your mattress and inside the box spring.
- Along bedroom baseboard cracks.
- In and around nightstands.
- Around electronic equipment.
- Other bedroom items, including window and door casings, pictures, moldings, nearby furniture, loose wallpaper, cracks in drywall/plaster and partitions, and clutter.

Thoroughly clean areas where bed bugs are likely to hide.

- Clean bedding, linens, curtains, rugs, carpets, and clothes. To kill bed bugs, dry the items first then wash in hot water. The drying kills any bed bugs and does not allow them to spread to the next person using the washing machine. Wool items, plush toys, shoes, and many other items can be placed into a hot dryer (at least 115 degrees) for 30 minutes to get rid of bed bugs. These items should be washed and dried 2-3 times per week while the problem exists to kill bed bugs and their eggs.
- Scrub mattress seams and box springs with a stiff brush to dislodge bed bugs and their eggs.
- Thoroughly vacuum mattresses, bed frames, nearby furniture, floors and carpets. Pay special attention to cracks and open spaces. Immediately after vacuuming, put the vacuum cleaner bag in a sealed plastic bag, and dispose of it in an outdoor container. Vacuuming frequently will help capture the bed bugs and reduce the problem faster.
- If you find bed bugs on a mattress, cover it with a waterproof, zippered mattress cover labeled “allergen rated,” or “for dust mites or bed bugs.” Keep the cover on for at least one year.
- If your box spring is infested, seal it inside a vinyl box spring cover (like the mattress cover) for at least one year. Box spring can also be treated by pesticide or heat treatment.
- Dispose of infested items that cannot be cleaned and get rid of clutter. Seal tightly in a plastic garbage bag and discard in an outside container.
- Repair cracks in plaster and repair or remove loose wallpaper.
- If items are thrown away cut large holes in them and label the furniture with bed bugs to discourage another person from picking up the items.

Be very cautious about using pesticides yourself.

Pesticides can be hazardous to people and pets. If you choose to use a pesticide, or a licensed pest control professional suggests you use one, follow these precautions:

- Follow label instructions exactly and carefully. Do not overuse pesticides.
- Only use pesticides clearly labeled for bed bug extermination. Never use a cockroach spray, roach bombs, ant spray, or any other pesticide that does not list bed bugs on the label. There are a few pesticides available in stores that are labeled for bed bugs.
- Never spray pesticides on top of mattresses or sofas, or in areas where children or pets are present.
- Never purchase or use a product without a manufacturer’s label and never buy pesticides from street vendors.

Non-poisonous alternatives (integrated pest management- ipm)

- Sprinkle diatomaceous earth in the areas where bed bugs and where people sleep. Diatomaceous earth can be found at some hardware and farm stores in the area. It is a simple white powder that is not harmful to people or pets.
- Reduce places where bed bugs can hide by closing cracks and crevices in the area of sleeping people.
- Use vacuums to sweep up bed bugs and throw away vacuum bags.
- Temperatures between 115° – 120° f and above can kill bed bugs.
- Success in getting rid of the bed bugs depends on how hard you work on the problem. Following instructions and pesticide labels will decrease the time your living space is infested. Bed bugs are hard to control and kill. One treatment ‘regimen’ is highly unlikely to solve the problem completely or immediately. Citizens should be prepared to follow these steps 2 – 3 times a week for 2 – 4 weeks, or more.

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Is my landlord or apartment manager responsible?

Laws vary by state. In some states there are no laws that require landlords or apartment managers to correct a bed bug infestation in currently occupied places. All States require that landlords rent out apartments, houses, etc. already pest free. Please consult your lease agreement for guidance on bed bugs and use of pesticides. For laws in your state visit the Bed Bugs Handbook.