



Bed Bugs

What are they? Where are they?
How to get rid of them!



Bed Bugs

What are they? Bed bugs are oval shaped, reddish-brown, wingless insects. Their size depends on how recently they have had a blood meal. An unfed bed bug is between 1/4 and 3/8 inches long. When engorged with blood, its body becomes elongated and swollen, and its color changes from brown to dull red. Under favorable conditions the female bed bug lays about 200 eggs at the rate of 3 or 4 per day. These eggs have a sticky coating that enables them to stay put so they have a better chance to hatch into nymphs. As nymphs, bed bugs molt five times before becoming adults and must have a blood meal to pass from each stage. And as adults they feed about once a week during their four months life span.



Bed Bug and Nymph
Image Courtesy of:
Dr. Harold Harlan - BCE

Bed bugs are blood feeders and they crawl into beds during the night while their victims are sleeping. A bed bug pierces the skin and injects anticoagulants and other fluids to help get their blood meal. Often this fluid causes a welt on the skin that becomes irritated, inflamed, and itchy. If left undisturbed, a full-grown bed bug becomes engorged with blood in 3 to 5 minutes. It then crawls into hiding, remaining there for several days to digest its meal. When hunger returns, the bug emerges from hiding and seeks another blood meal. Fortunately, bed bugs do not carry or transmit any human disease, but the mere presence of any blood-feeding insect is disconcerting, at best.



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Where are they? The common bed bug received its name from its close association with human bedding. Eggs are deposited in small cracks in the bed frame, mattress seams, or in baseboards, trim or furniture near the bed. The nymphs and the adults reside near one another, hiding in such cracks awaiting nightfall when they might venture out to feed. In some cases, the offending bed bugs are harboring many feet from the bed in cracks in furniture, baseboards, doorframes, or even within voids in the wall. If populations become large, or when a host becomes scarce because no one sleeps in the bed for a period of time, bed bugs may crawl into other rooms or squeeze through walls to enter neighboring locations. They may also be transported from place to place hiding in furniture. They are introduced into homes mainly by clothing and baggage of travelers and visitors, secondhand beds, bedding materials, furniture and laundry.



Bed Bugs in Tucks of Mattress
Image Courtesy of:
Dr. Harold Harlan - BCE

Bed bugs love to hide under the wood moldings between the carpet and the floor. They will also get into electric outlets, under switch plate covers and behind both paneling and wall paper.

The presence of bed bugs is evident by black or brown spots of dried blood excrement on the surfaces where the bugs rest. Eggs, egg shells, and cast skins may be found near these places. Usually there is an offensive odor where bed bugs are numerous. In early infestations the bed bugs are found only about the tufts, seams, and folds of mattresses and daybed covers; later they spread to cracks and crevices in the bedsteads. If allowed to multiply, they establish themselves behind baseboards, window and door casings, pictures, and moldings, and in furniture, loosened wallpaper, and cracks in plaster and partitions.

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How to get rid of them! The best way to eliminate bed bugs is by finding places where they hide in the daytime and cleaning these sites as thoroughly as possible. However a thorough cleaning may need to be done more than once to get rid of them completely.

- Vacuum the mattress, especially the tucks and along seams where bedbugs like to hide.
- Be sure to remove and seal the vacuum cleaner bag immediately after cleaning.
- Place the vacuum cleaner bag into a plastic garbage bag, tightly seal, and discard.
- In addition, you can put a zippered mattress cover, such as is used for dust mites, on the mattress. This traps any bugs inside. Bed bugs can live a long time without a meal, so it is best to leave the cover on the mattress for at least a year.
- If you decide to treat yourself, apply a household insecticide that is labeled for bed bug control.
- **Do not apply an insecticide directly to the mattress** unless the label specifically gives directions for this use. For these insecticides, apply a light mist to the entire mattress to penetrate the seams, tufts, and folds.



Allow the mattress to dry for several hours before use. However, if bugs persist for 2 weeks or more, it is advisable to do a second treatment. For heavily infested homes or apartments, a commercial pest control operator should be consulted to control the infestation. **Read and follow all labeled instructions carefully.**

- If the infestation is severe, or you are unable to get control with other methods the services of a pest management professional is a good idea and may be needed.

