

What Are Bed Bugs?

Bed bugs are small insects that feed on human blood. Adult bed bugs are reddish-brown, wingless and about the size of an apple seed. Their flat bodies allow them to move in and out of very narrow spaces, such as behind baseboards, around screws in furniture and, as their name suggests, in the seams and crevices of mattresses and other furniture. While not life-threatening, bed bug infestations can negatively affect a person's quality of life.

Bed bugs have been found in every major Ohio city, and reports to local health departments have increased recently. The insects frequently are found in hotels, dormitories and apartments – places where the occupants change frequently - but can be spread to other locations, such as cars and homes, quite easily. Bed bugs hitch rides on clothing, luggage, bedding and furniture, so care is necessary to avoid spreading infestations.

Newly hatched bed bugs resemble adults but are white or yellowish in color. Their eggs are white, about the size of a pinhead and usually are found in crevices in clusters of 10-50 eggs. Under the right conditions, bed bugs can grow to adults in as little as a month and produce three or more generations per year. Immature bed bugs can survive months without feeding, and the adults can go for more than a year without food.



How do I know if I have bed bugs?

Bed bugs do not have nests and are great at hiding. Unless an infestation is severe, you may not see bugs in the open. You'll have to examine common hiding places for tell-tale signs, such as dark spots and stains. Here are the most likely places to find them:

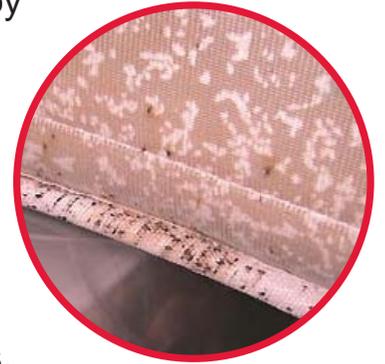
- **In pillowcases, sheets,** box springs and the seams and tufts of mattresses;
- **Behind your bed's headboard,** the baseboards, anything stored under the bed and furniture near the bed, such as your nightstands;
- **Inside window and door casings,** pictures, moldings, loose wallpaper, cracks in the plaster and clutter;
- **In couches and chairs** in which you spend a lot of time;
- **Inside electrical outlets and light switches,** phones, clocks, smoke detectors and toys; and
- **Around pets** and their usual resting spots.

Continued...

What Are Bed Bugs? (continued)

How Bad Is a Bed Bug's Bite?

Bed bugs usually bite people at night while they are sleeping, and feed on any skin that is exposed. Their bites are characterized by rows of welts and are initially painless. Bed bug bites may cause itchy red welts or localized swelling within a day or so of the bite. Severe itching could last for several hours to days and scratching can cause the welts to become infected.



Your doctor may prescribe antihistamines and corticosteroids to reduce allergic reactions to bed bug bites, and antiseptic or antibiotic ointments to prevent infection. Bed bugs are not known to transmit diseases to humans.

How Can I Keep Bed Bugs Out of My Home?

Your best defense against bed bugs is to prevent them from coming into your home in the first place.

- **Check your shoes** and clothing before you come into your home, especially if you have been using public transportation or have been to a location where many different people congregate or pass through (such as a doctor's office or meal site).
- **If you have care providers** coming into your home, ask them how they have been trained to limit the spread of bed bugs and how they will prevent bringing bed bugs into your home.
- **Inspect used furniture** for bed bugs before bringing it into your home.
- **Never bring discarded** bed frames, mattresses, box springs or furniture into your home.
- **When traveling**, inspect the bed and furniture where you are staying. Keep suitcases off the floor and bed, and inspect them before you leave.
- **Wash all clothing** immediately after returning from a trip and inspect your luggage for signs of bed bugs.

Don't Spread Bed Bugs

Bed bugs are small, brownish, flattened insects that feed on human blood. While not life-threatening, bed bug infestations can negatively affect a person's quality of life. They "hitchhike" from place to place on clothing, furniture, luggage and more. It can be easy to pick up the bugs or their eggs in one location and carry them to another, where they will hide and keep breeding, spreading the problem.

Once a residence is infested with bed bugs, it can be difficult to get rid of them. Thus, the best defense is to do all we can to prevent their spread in the first place. Any worker who visits consumers in their homes or apartments must be vigilant to prevent spreading bed bugs to the work place and other homes, including their own.



Be Prepared

Before a home visit, ask the client if he or she is having or recently has had the home treated for roaches or bed bugs. If available, check for a list of buildings in your area with known infestations before going on any home visit. When you are going into a residence that may have bed bugs, there are certain tools you will need to prevent carrying the insects and their eggs to other locations:

- **Protective booties and coveralls;**
- **A spray bottle containing a 70 percent solution of isopropyl alcohol;**
- **Disposable, sealable, plastic bags for transporting clothing and equipment that has become contaminated;**
- **A change of clothes and shoes in a sealed bag, and**
- **A plastic stool.**

Check with your employer to see if some of these items can be provided for you. Wear protective shoe covers (booties) before entering an infested residence, and wear disposable, protective coveralls if you will be moving items in the residence that may contain bed bugs. Take only those items that are necessary for your visit into the home and do not sit on or place any items on sofas, upholstered chairs, beds or carpets. Use the plastic stool if your duties include sitting down to assist the consumer.

Continued...

Don't Spread Bed Bugs (continued)

Once you leave the residence, remove protective shoe covers and coveralls. If in a multi-unit building, DO NOT leave the shoe covers on as you walk through the building. Turn the items inside out as they are removed to trap any bugs inside. Place them in a tightly sealed plastic bag and immediately put the bag in an outside trash container.

Carefully inspect your clothing and shoes before you get into your car or other vehicle. Pay close attention to the insides and outsides of your shoes, lace holes, socks, pant legs, leg area and around hands and arms. Spray isopropyl alcohol directly onto any visible bed bugs. Also, keep your car clean of clutter, vacuum it weekly and monitor for signs of infestation.

What to Do if You Find Bed Bugs

If you encounter bed bugs in a residence not previously known to be infested, notify the occupants that they have bed bugs and should clean to remove them. Advise the occupants to limit their visits to other places to prevent the spread. Then, notify a supervisor and go straight home.

Once home:

- **Remove all clothing** on a hard, solid floor just inside the entry door.
- **Immediately place the clothing** in a trash bag and seal it. Keep the clothing bagged until you can wash it.
- **Wash contaminated clothing** in hot, soapy water and dry in a dryer using the highest heat setting.
- **Decontaminate clothing** or other items that cannot be washed by putting them in a hot dryer for at least 15 minutes.
- **Take a shower** or bath.
- **Continue monitoring** your home and vehicle for signs of infestation.

The Ohio Department of Aging thanks the Central Ohio Bed Bug Task Force for contributing to this fact sheet.

How Can I Get Rid of Bed Bugs?

Bed bugs are small, brownish, flattened insects that feed on human blood.

While bed bugs are most common in places where the occupants change frequently, such as hotels, dormitories and apartments, you or someone you know can bring them into your home on your clothes, in luggage or in used furniture, among other ways. Having them in your home is not an indication of poor housekeeping or lack of cleanliness. While not life-threatening, bed bug infestations can be difficult to get rid of and can negatively affect your quality of life.

Unless an infestation is severe, you may never see the bugs themselves. Signs of bed bugs include stains or dark spots in and around crevices and creases of furniture, or itchy skin welts that result from their bites. If they get into your home, special care must be taken to prevent spreading them to other locations.



Prevent Spreading Bed Bugs

The first and most important step to dealing with bed bugs is to prevent yourself, as well as anyone who comes into your home, from carrying the insects or their eggs to other locations.

- **If you have a case manager**, alert him or her about the bed bug problem. He or she will give you guidance in removing them and can help arrange extermination services, if necessary.
- **If you receive in-home services**, alert your care providers so that they can prepare their workers to prevent spreading the bed bugs to other consumers.
- **If you live in an apartment**, alert the property manager so that he or she can check the entire building.

Removal and Cleaning

To get bed bugs out of your home, first identify and remove potential hiding places.

- **Remove clutter** like boxes, papers and piles of clothing.
- **Remove smaller items** that may be infested, such as picture frames, books and clothing.
- **Place items** that cannot be cleaned into plastic garbage bags, seal them and put them in the outdoor trash.

Continued...

Next, clean what you can:

- **Wash bedding**, curtains, rugs and clothes in hot water (120°F minimum) and dry on the highest dryer setting. Soak delicates in warm water with lots of laundry soap for several hours before rinsing. Place wool items, plush toys, shoes and other similar items in a hot dryer for 30 minutes.
- **Vacuum mattresses**, bed frames, furniture, floors and carpets, especially in cracks and open spaces. When finished, vacuum ¼ cup of cornstarch or talcum powder to suffocate any bugs in the vacuum, empty it into a plastic bag, seal it and dispose of it in the outdoor trash.
- **Scrub mattress seams** with a stiff brush to dislodge bed bugs and their eggs. Cover infested mattresses and box springs with waterproof, zippered covers labeled “allergen rated” or “for dust mites” for at least one year.
- **Check pets** and pet bedding as you do other furnishings.

Finally, throw out what you can't clean:

- **Damage items such as furniture and mattresses** to discourage others from taking them into their own homes.
- **Remove loose wallpaper** and repair cracks in the plaster.

Calling in a Professional

A thorough cleaning may not be enough to get rid of bed bugs. Pest control specialists can battle tough infestations with a variety of techniques. Ask your friends and family members for referrals. The specialist should inspect your property and give you a written treatment plan. He or she will tell you what infested items can be effectively cleaned and what should be discarded. He or she also will work with you until the bugs are gone and teach you how to prevent re-infestation.

Ask the professional to:

- **Use the least-toxic pesticide** labeled for bed bugs that will be effective;
- **Follow all instructions** and warnings on product labels;
- **Respond to your questions** about how the treatments will affect pets;
- **Tell you** when it's safe to re-enter a treated room; and
- **Never spray the top of mattresses or sofas**, and if needed, to use only small amounts of pesticides on their seams only.

Agree on a service plan and its costs before work begins. Expect at least two treatments, plus a follow-up visit to confirm that the bugs have been eliminated.