



## U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Pesticide Programs

### “BED BUGS” February 19, 2009

#### 1. What are Bed Bugs?

- Bed bugs are small wingless insects that feed only on blood. They prefer the blood of humans but also feed on the blood of other animals including the family pet. They are most active at night when people are sleeping, and they prefer to feed in the dark.
- Bed bugs are  $\frac{1}{4}$  of an inch long with flat, rusty-red-colored oval bodies.
- Although they are the size of an apple seed, bed bugs are big enough to be seen but often hide in cracks in furniture, floors or walls.
- Bed bugs can survive for long period between feedings. Under the right conditions an adult bed bug can live up to 2 years without a blood meal.
- Bed bugs tend to cluster together in groups in dark places like cracks and crevices, and are commonly found near their human hosts in bed frames, head boards, mattresses and box springs. However, they can also be found under wallpaper, for example, between or beneath floorboards and carpeting, under decorative moldings, in or under furniture, behind picture frames and inside wall voids. Bed bugs are flat and can live anywhere a credit card edge can fit.

#### 2. Are bed bugs dangerous?

Currently, no research has shown that bed bugs can transmit disease, but their bites can cause people to scratch and this can lead to secondary infections. Their presence in the home, results in stress, loss of work, loss of sleep, and financial burden. The difficulty in finding bed bugs and the lengthy time it can take to exterminate them makes an infestation expensive to eradicate. The quicker you are in identifying and responding to an infestation, the better. Early detection can save you considerable time and money in eliminating this pest.

#### 3. How can one diagnose a bed bug bite?

- The presence of bites is not a reliable indicator of a bed bug infestation. People react differently to bed bug bites. For example, some people will be fed upon and react two weeks later, while others might never react.
- The only way to ultimately diagnose a bed bug bite is to find a bed bug in the act of biting a person right there and then.

#### 4. Where do bed bugs come from?

Bed bugs don't just appear spontaneously in a home or apartment. They can not fly or jump so most of the time they find their way inside by "hitchhiking" on bags, furniture, wires or pipes. The most common ways bed bugs infestations get started are:

- Travelers bring bed bugs from infested hotels or motels in their luggage.
- If you purchase used or second hand items or have items such as furniture or bedding delivered home.
- Bed bugs can hitch a ride to another location by hanging on clothing.
- Family members living away from home, for example, at college, camp, boarding school, etc.

#### **5. How does one know if their home is infested with bud bugs?**

- Be on the look-out for signs of bed bugs, such as:
  - Live bugs
  - Eggs, egg shells or shed body skins
  - Droppings left by bed bugs
  - Blood stains on bed
- A physical sample of an actual bug or egg is required to be 100% certain that one has bed bugs in their home.
- Canine scent detection – the advantage of using specially trained dogs to detect bed bugs is that they detect the infestation through their sense of smell rather than relying on visual detection.

#### **6. What can you do to prevent bed bugs?**

- Take care while traveling. Check your hotel room for bed bugs and, if you find any evidence of bed bugs, refuse the room. Store your suitcase on a suitcase rack rather than on the floor.
- Avoid bed bug-infested materials. Do not bring mattresses, beds or other furniture that have been discarded by a dumpster or at the side of the road into your home.
- Be careful when purchasing used or reconditioned items for your home. Check reconditioned mattresses and furniture to be sure they are not infested.
- Act immediately if you suspect bed bugs are in your home, The longer you wait, the more difficult and, potentially, the more expensive it will be to rid yourself of these pests
- Contact a pest management professional to help you control the problem and do not attempt to handle it alone. Reduce clutter to limit hiding places for bed bugs.
- Do not store items under the bed. Items stored under the bed give bed bugs additional undisturbed areas to hide protected from any chemical treatment.

#### **7. What should you do if you find bed bugs in your home?**

- Thoroughly clean the infested rooms as well as others in the residence.
- Scrub infested surfaces with a stiff brush to dislodge eggs and use a powerful vacuum with a crevice attachment to remove bed bugs from cracks and crevices.
- As soon as you are done vacuuming, the vacuum bag should be tied shut in the trash bag and discarded outside of the home. Check vacuum brushes since bed bugs may attach themselves to the bristles.
- Remove drawers from desks and dressers and turn furniture over, if possible, to inspect and clean all hiding spots.
- Mattresses and box springs can be permanently encased within special encasements.
- Launder items regularly in hot water and also dry on the hottest dryer setting. Heat is deadly to bed bugs, therefore hot laundering can be a highly effective method for killing any bed bugs or eggs found on linens or any other item.
- To prevent bed bugs from crawling onto a bed, pull the bed frame away from the wall, tuck sheets and blankets so they won't contact the floor and place the frame legs into dishes or cups of mineral oil.
- Caulk and seal all holes where pipes and wires penetrate walls and floors and fill cracks around baseboards.
- Contact a pest management professional.

#### **8. What should you look for in selecting a pest control company?**

- Use only a licensed pest control firm.
- Choose a company with experience controlling bed bugs in sites like yours (single family housing, multi-family housing, etc.)
- Ask for references.
- Do not hire a company before they explain their plan of action in detail including your responsibilities. In most cases, the pest management company will ask the homeowner not to move much in the home, given the fact that they want to see what the infestation looks like on the initial visit and then supervise the movement of goods out of the home, making sure the goods are protected so the infestation does not easily spread.
- Expect at least 2-3 return visits, for most infestations, as part of the bed bug treatments. These visits will usually be spaced about 10 days apart and retreatment will involve the same measures as before.
- Do not expect the company to guarantee to eradicate the bed bugs; most experienced companies will not offer such a guarantee.

- The quicker you are in identifying and responding to an infestation, the better. Early detection can save you considerable time and money in eliminating this pest.

For more information please call (443) 984-2460 or visit  
[www.epa.gov/pesticides](http://www.epa.gov/pesticides)