

Bed Bugs

Sleep tight and don't let the bed bugs bite. 



Inservice/Continuing Education Credit Courses

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Introduction

Bed bug infestations have been reported in the news recently as increasing in frequency. Most commonly, these reports are of infestations in hotels or other public housing. There appears to also be an increase in private homes. Knowing how to recognize these pests and the methods that can be used to prevent or eliminate an infestation is warranted.

What are bed bugs?



Bed bugs have been documented as far back as the 17th century. It's believed that the first colonists to America brought bed bugs to this continent. Bed bugs are small, oval, flat, insects that live on the blood of animals and humans. Adult bed bugs are about the size of an apple seed. They are brownish red and right after feeding, when they are full of blood, the color is more reddish. Although they do not fly, they can move very quickly across floors, walls, ceilings, and furniture.

Bed bugs are NOT an indication of cleanliness or wealth. Because they are so small they can hide in the seams of clothing, mattresses and wall paper. They can be found on airplanes, trains, ships, buses and just about wherever there are animals or humans. Bed bugs have been found in some of the nicest 5-star hotels, cruise ships and luxury apartments. Most commonly, bed bugs are found where there is a high turnover in residents such as hotels, motels, dormitories, shelters, and apartments.

Bed bugs live up to 18 months. An adult female can lay up to a dozen eggs each day. She deposits the eggs in crevices and seams. The eggs hatch in 6 to 17 days. The baby bed bugs are called "nymphs". The nymphs begin feeding on blood immediately after hatching. The nymph goes through 5 stages, losing its outer shell with each. They feed on a large blood meal just before losing the shell. Bed bugs mostly feed on blood during the night while the host sleeps. The host is any warm blooded animal, including humans. Although bed bugs feed until they are full of blood, they can go several months between meals.

Do bed bugs spread disease?

No. Bed bugs do not spread disease or make people sick. A bed bug bite affects each person differently. Bite responses can range from nothing at all to a small bite mark to a serious allergic reaction. Bed bugs are NOT considered dangerous.

A bed bug bite may cause a small, hard, swollen, red welt with a white center. These welts may itch for several hours, or even days. Scratching these can break the skin which could become infected. The amount of blood taken by the bed bugs is not enough to cause any harm.



How do you know if there is a bed bug infestation?



You may not immediately know there is an infestation. Look for blood stains from crushed bugs or rusty spots of bug excrement on sheets and mattresses, night clothes or the walls. Be sure to inspect seams and all cracks and crevices. You may also find the empty shell left after an immature bed bug molts. An offensive, sweet musty odor may be detected when the infestation is severe.

Although bites indicate an infestation, the bites may not appear for several days later. If you find welts inspect them carefully. Bed bug bites have a white center. Flea bites however have a red center.

How do you prevent getting bed bugs?

Don't bring bed bugs into the home. Inspect the seams of luggage and clothing when traveling to make sure there are no hitchhikers on board. If you buy second hand beds, linens and furniture, inspect them very carefully before taking them in the home. Caulk all cracks and crevices on the exterior of the home.

Bed bugs can travel over 100 feet in a night but generally live within 8 feet of where people or animals sleep. In case any bugs get past your inspections, vacuum regularly, being sure to take the vacuumed contents immediately outside in a sealed plastic bag. Watch for and repair cracks in plaster, dry wall or wall paper and repair these as you find them. This will decrease the number of places possible bugs can hide or eggs can be laid.

How do you get rid of bed bugs?

There is no one single method of ridding a home of bed bugs. If you suspect bed bugs, vacuum the entire home carefully, including mattresses and other furniture. As soon as you finish put the bag or contents of the canister in a zippered plastic bag. Immediately take the bag outside to the trash. In addition to vacuuming, wash all washable fabrics in hot water. The temperature needs to be at least 120 degrees to kill the bugs. If possible, put mattresses in zippered plastic covers. This will contain any remaining bugs and eggs. Leave the cover in place at least a year since bugs can go several months between feedings.



Severe infestations usually are best treated by a licensed pest management professional.

Summary

Bed bugs are tiny, flat bugs that feed on blood from humans and animals. Although bed bugs do not carry or cause disease, they can cause allergic reactions and itching. Scratching the skin where it itches can break the skin, providing a way for germs to get into the body, making the person sick. The best way to prevent bed bugs is to diligently inspect seams, crevices and other possible hiding places on a regular basis, but particularly after traveling and when purchasing used goods. Finding bed bugs is not a sign of poor housekeeping but regular, frequent vacuuming can help eliminate any bugs that do find their way to your home. Wash bed linens frequently and use hot water. For help eliminating large bed bug infestations, it is recommended that you contact a professional exterminator.

References

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