Bed Bugs

Bed bugs are small, wingless insects that feed on blood from humans and other animals.

These insects hide along seams of mattresses, within box springs, or within cracks and crevices in furniture, personal belongings, and areas near sleeping and resting sites. Eliminating an infestation is best done by a professional pest control company and may require removing or treating all infested material and monitoring to be sure bugs are gone.

Bed bug identification and biology.

- Adults are small (about 1/5 inch), flattened, oval, and rusty red. Nymphs (immature stages) are smaller and lighter colored.
- Bed bugs feed only on blood and must have one blood meal prior to molting to the next stage.
- Adults may feed every 5 to 7 days but can survive many months without food.

What are associated health problems?

- Bed bug feeding is usually painless; sleeping victims are typically unaware.
- Areas around bites might redden, swell, and itch several days later. Some people have no reaction.
- Bed bugs aren't known to spread diseases, but scratching bites can lead to infections.

How does a bed bug infestation start?

- People can bring bed bugs into their homes on luggage, clothes, bedding, furniture, or other objects. Bed bugs can be picked up in hotels or other places during overnight visits.
- Hotels, homeless shelters, furnished apartments, and dormitories are most at risk of becoming infested.
- Second-hand mattresses and furniture are known to be high-risk sources of potential bed bug infestations.

For more information about managing pests, visit ipm.ucanr.edu or your local University of California Cooperative Extension office.

Quick Tips

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Detecting bed bugs.

- Using a flashlight and magnifying glass, look for bed bugs, their dark fecal spots, and light-brown shed skins.
- Inspect mattresses, box springs, bed frames, and other areas near sleeping and resting surfaces.
- Bed bugs like to hide. Remove bedding. Look in cracks and holes. Turn furniture upside down and take apart frames if necessary.
- Several kinds of bed bug detection traps are available to help determine if your home is infested.

Use nonchemical methods to get rid of small numbers of bed bugs.

- Vacuum along mattress seams, baseboards, and other bed bug hiding areas.
- Wash all bedding and clothing in hot (120°F) water and dry them using the hottest setting.
- Specially designed mattress encasements are helpful in preventing infestations and sealing bed bugs within so they can’t bite.

Serious infestations require professional help and may include insecticide treatments.

- If you rent your home, contact your landlord or property owner so that they can help you manage your infestation. Tenants have rights.
- Hire a reputable pest control company with experience managing bed bugs. They have access to the most effective monitoring techniques and management products.
- Insecticides alone won’t control bed bugs. Remove or heat-treat infested materials, and limit hiding spots to prevent future infestations.
- Inspect after treatments to be sure bugs are gone.

What you do in your home and landscape affects our water and health.

- Minimize the use of pesticides that pollute our waterways and harm human health.
- Use nonchemical alternatives or less toxic pesticide products whenever possible.
- Read product labels carefully and follow instructions on proper use, storage, and disposal.