

Frequently Asked Questions about Bed Bugs

OVERVIEW: Bed bugs are small insects without wings. At one time they were almost eliminated from the United States. However, currently are found in all 50 states including Iowa. Bed bugs are not known to spread disease. Bed bug bites usually will cause large itchy welts on the skin. These welts may not appear for 24 to 48 hours after the bite.



What are bed bugs?

A bed bug is a small insect without wings. Adult bed bugs look similar to a tick and have flat copper colored bodies that are about 1/4 inch in length. Young bed bugs (nymphs) are nearly colorless and very small. Bed bugs mostly feed on the blood of humans.



Where are bed bugs found?

Bed bugs are found most often around areas where people sleep or rest. Adult bed bugs or evidence of their presence can be found with the aid of a flashlight and careful inspection. Small bloodstains from crushed bed bugs or dark brown spots from bed bug droppings may be evident on mattresses. Because bed bug nymphs shed their skin several times, the “empty shells” may also be evident.



Why don't people see bed bugs?

Bed bugs are most active between midnight and 3 am. They are rarely active during daylight hours, and only come out when they sense the warmth and odors of a body at rest. Because of their small flat bodies, they can hide in the cracks and crevices of mattresses, bedding, furniture, and draperies, and are difficult to spot without careful inspection.



Are bed bugs dangerous?

Bed bugs do not transmit disease. However, bed bug bites can cause large itchy welts on the skin. A person's reaction to insect bites is an immune response and can vary widely from person to person. The bites themselves are usually painless and rarely awaken a sleeping person.



How long do bed bugs live?

The typical life span of a bed bug is between 10 months and a year. In general, bed bugs seek a meal of blood every 4 or 5 days. However, they can survive for weeks to several months without eating.



What should I do if I find bed bugs?

Integrated pest management, which uses multiple ways to get rid of pests, is one of the best ways to rid your home of bed bugs. Prevention, sanitation, and pesticide/insecticide use are several tactics that can be applied.



Prevention

Items infested with bed bugs should not be brought into your home.

- ▶ Check luggage and clothing carefully after travel looking for bed bugs and bug droppings.
 - ▶ Place clothing in a hot dryer for 30 minutes to kill the bugs. Then, launder the items.
 - ▶ Carefully examine any secondhand furniture, bedding, or beds before bringing home.
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Sanitation

Although infestation with bed bugs does not necessarily indicate a sanitation problem, it is important to thoroughly clean rooms infested with bed bugs, as well as other rooms as bed bugs can travel throughout the home.

- ▶ Put infested items into a hot dryer for 30 minutes to kill the bugs. Then, wash the items in hot water.
 - ▶ Remove drawers from furniture and clean, and turn furniture over to inspect and clean.
 - ▶ Vacuum the affected item and area (paying special attention to cracks and crevices), then place the vacuum bag in a plastic bag, seal tightly, and dispose of it in a container outdoors.
 - ▶ The affected item(s) may be discarded, although new ones may become infested if bed bugs are still present.
 - ▶ When disposing of an infested item, destroy the item and mark as infested with bed bugs so it will not be acquired by someone else, infecting their residence.
 - ▶ Seal cracks in plaster, holes in walls, and loose wallpaper to eliminate hiding places for bed bugs.
 - ▶ Remove clutter as it can also hide bed bugs.
 - ▶ Mattresses and box springs can be enclosed in a zippered mattress cover that has no tears or holes. Trapped bugs will eventually die. This should be left in place for a year or more as bed bugs can live for long periods without feeding.
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Pesticide/Insecticide

A licensed pest control operator with experience in controlling bed bug populations may be able to work with you on a plan to manage the infestation in a residence you own. Tenants should contact their property manager to work on a plan to manage the infestation.

- ▶ If live bed bugs are still present after two weeks it may be necessary to treat again.
- ▶ If you seek professional help, request a written plan from the pest control operator that explains what they will do in your home and what products they will use.