

FACT SHEET

Recognizing and Controlling Bed Bugs



Bed bugs are parasitic insects that feed on the blood of people and animals while they sleep.

Adult bed bugs are about the size of an apple seed, reddish-brown in color, wingless and have an oval-shaped, flat body. Bed bug infestations occur around the world, typically in or near beds where eggs can hatch and bugs can hide in folds, cracks and crevices during the day. Bed bugs can live for months without feeding.

Exposure Risk

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reports it is highly unlikely for a bed bug infestation to develop in an office, classroom or other non-residential environment such as a warehouse or store.

Health officials say bed bugs should not be considered a medical or public health hazard; they are not known to spread disease.

Signs and Symptoms

It's often not immediately apparent when you have been bitten by bed bugs. Aside from seeing bugs, signs include:

- exoskeletons after molting
- rust-colored blood spots
- a sweet, musty odor

Bite marks—a slightly swollen spot or red area—may not appear for days. Bite marks may be random or appear in a straight line. Similar to a mosquito or flea bite, a bed bug bite may itch and be irritating. Other symptoms of bed bug bites may include an allergic reaction, sleep loss and anxiety.

Treatment

Minimal treatment and good hygiene to prevent itching and secondary infections are usually sufficient for most bed bug bites. A wide range of treatments including antibiotics, antihistamines, topical and oral corticosteroids, and epinephrine reportedly have been used for bite reactions with varying results. Topical antiseptics or antibiotics may be recommended to treat secondary infection.

Prevention

Awareness is key. As part of prevention efforts, health officials say it is important to discourage counterproductive rumors and the stigma associated with bed bugs. To help prevent infestations in the workplace, the EPA recommends the following:

- Store personal belongings in a secure place.
- Learn how to recognize a bed bug and establish a monitoring program; be vigilant in areas such as storage closets,

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offices or lounges with upholstered furniture, and areas where people may rest.

- Remove clutter.
- Vacuum daily and safely discard bags after each use.

Before and after traveling:

Inspect the room where you will be sleeping. A flashlight is useful:

- Check the mattress and headboard.
- Inspect luggage racks and use them rather than placing bags or backpacks on the bed or floor.
- Upon returning home, unpack directly into a washing machine and inspect your luggage carefully.
- Do not store suitcases under your bed.

Control



In the event of an infestation, it may be necessary to consult with a pest control professional. In some instances, approved pesticides may be applied when building occupants are not present. Items such as bedding, clothing or clutter removed from an infested area should be placed in a sealed plastic bag and treated with a recommended pesticide.

Non-chemical control methods include heat treatment using a clothes dryer on high heat, putting infested items in black plastic bags placed in the sun or a hot car, or putting small items in a freezer for at least four days.

References

1. Parasites: Bed Bugs; Centers for Disease Control and Protection;
www.cdc.gov/parasites/bedbugs/
2. Protecting Yourself from Bed Bugs in Public Places; Environmental Protection Agency;
www2.epa.gov/bedbugs/protecting-yourself-bed-bugs-public-places