

## Bed Bug Facts and Tips

The world is made up of parasites. Some are bigger, some are smaller; some are dangerous and many are perfectly harmless. Few, however, are as disturbing to humans as the lowly bed bug.

Tiny parasites like dust mites can be found in virtually every mattress. Other, larger insects called bed bugs are also found in many homes in North America, and around the world. Due in part to increased foreign travel, bed bugs are making their way across the continent, taking up residence in hotels, restaurants, motels, hostels, shelters, apartments and family homes.

Bed bugs are tiny brown creatures that appear flat in shape. They feed on the blood of animals, and have taken a particular liking to humans. A common variety of bed bug called *Cimex lectularius* has adapted to living with humans and is regularly found in homes.

In their adult stage of life, bed bugs can easily be mistaken for ticks. While they don't fly, they are extremely agile and move very quickly over floors, walls and other surfaces. They are extremely resilient and can live without blood from a host for up to a year. Bed bugs are able to lie dormant the entire time, waiting patiently for the next victim to arrive.

Bed bugs are nocturnal, so it's hard for people to know whether they are present. The only time that these pests move about is at night, when we are usually asleep. For this reason, eliminating them is a big problem. It's hard to know where to apply the pesticide if one cannot see the bugs in action. Bed bugs are great hidiers and will typically come out to feed on a blood meal in the middle of the night. While it cannot be confirmed if bed bugs are aware that their hosts are asleep when they feed, their habits suggest that they can more or less sense if the host is in a relaxed state.

Different people can present various symptoms after being bitten by bed bugs. Some people have no reaction whatsoever to the insect bits. Many victims experience an itchy, swollen bump on the skin where the bite occurred. Still others will react more severely, with inflamed welt marks on the skin.

Bed bugs feed by piercing their hosts' skin with long beak, and then sucking the blood through the beak. Like fleas and mosquitoes, the bed bug's body will become engorged in three to ten minutes without the victim noticing. Perhaps it is their patience in retrieving the blood at a slow and steady pace that makes them virtually unnoticed by humans.

Transmitting disease is, of course, a major concern. Since there have been no documented cases of disease passed on by bed bugs, it has been all but dismissed by science. It appears that the extent of damage to their hosts is in the swelling and itchiness felt at the bite locations.

Bed bug infestation is a real concern. It is possible for bed bugs to produce three generations in a year. Female bed bugs lay their eggs in very secluded areas, such as in the folds of a mattress, and will deposit up to five eggs a day. Because of the sheer number of eggs, and the fact that each of these eggs will hatch, grow and multiply three times a year, it's easy to see how quickly an infestation can occur. The bugs will spread throughout the house, leaving the family anxious, itchy and suffering many sleepless nights.

If you feel that your home may be victim to bed bugs, look for these signs:

- \* Waking with unexplained itchy areas or swollen welts on the face, neck or body.
- \* Dark stains or evidence of blood on the mattress
- \* Small brown or reddish spots on pillows, sheets or walls

If you regularly experience these indicators, then you likely have a bed bug problem in your home.

The typical reaction is to throw away the mattress, although you should know that bed bugs could live in other pieces of furniture, carpets and other areas of the home. Bed bugs can lie dormant for a lengthy period of time, so even a thorough washing may not be enough to entirely solve the problem. Be careful with pesticides, however, particular on your bedding. Your best defense is through a professional pest control company. They will provide an experienced fumigator or pest exterminator to combat the insects, and will likely offer some sort of guarantee against re-infestation.

Bed bugs are a typical parasite that are becoming more common every day, so don't be embarrassed if they find their way into your home. Call a professional, take care of the problem, and sleep tight.