

Bed Bugs are Back...and Probably Here to Stay

In the early to mid-20th century, this annoying little pest was common; many of our parents and grandparents remember them well. The itchy welts they leave behind and significant costs to control them are unpleasant reminders that bed bugs have returned in a big way. Rich or poor, anyone can get bed bugs. Hotels, apartment complexes, private residences, hospitals, public transportation, movie theaters – they can be found anywhere people congregate. Why are we seeing this resurgence? Likely it is due to more international travel, as well as, tighter restrictions on pesticides once used to control them.

What are bed bugs? They are insects in a group known as the “true bugs.” Their mouthparts pierce skin to feed on human blood. For the most part, their bite is painless. Some people are extremely sensitive to bites and others don’t react at all. Bed bugs cannot jump or fly.

What do bed bugs look like? They’re flat, oval-shaped and reddish to dark brown. They pass through three life stages – the egg which is white and 1mm long, nymphs that look like the adult but are smaller, and the adult. Fully grown, an adult bed bug is about the size of an apple seed. Nymphs and adults feed at night on the blood of sleeping persons, usually for 10-15 minutes. They feed every three days or so but can survive several months without a blood meal.

What are the signs you’ve been bitten? Typically one will see red bumps or swellings that resemble mosquito bites. Scratching these can make the situation worse. If there is anything positive about bed bugs it is this – **THEY DO NOT CARRY DISEASES.**

Humans acquire them by visiting places bed bugs live and then carrying them home on clothing or luggage. Infested furniture is another common source. Once in your home, bed bugs rest during the day in areas such as:

- Seams in mattresses
- Box springs and bed frames
- Head boards
- Folds of curtains
- Chairs or other furniture
- Behind baseboards
- Under edges of carpet
- Behind electrical plates or window casements
- In TVs, radios, and telephones

What should I do if I suspect bed bugs in my home? **GET A POSITIVE IDENTIFICATION.** Take a sample to a Washington State University Extension office, a local Department of Health office, or to a pest management professional (PMP) in your area. You could have a problem with fleas or no insect problem at all. An accurate identification can save you lots of money.

Do a visual inspection with a good flashlight. If you find something that looks like blood stains on your mattress or see live bed bugs, do not panic. This is a nuisance pest that can be controlled. But don't try to control them without doing your homework.

HOME CHEMICAL REMEDIES DO NOT WORK AND ARE DANGEROUS.

Using products such as bleach, ammonia, gasoline or mixing pesticides commonly available to homeowners can contaminate your home or make you violently ill. Pesticides labeled for outdoor or agricultural use should never be used indoors. They are not registered for this use by the Environmental Protection Agency or WSDA nor have they been tested for safety to humans or pets.

BUG BOMBS DO NOT WORK; THEY MAKE THE PROBLEM WORSE.

Bed bugs are resistant to the pesticides found in bug bombs or other aerosols. These products will simply force them to move to adjoining rooms.

Your best course of action is to obtain the services of a WSDA-licensed PMP having the skills and tools to effectively treat bed bugs. This likely will take more than one treatment, often two to four. No one tactic alone will control bed bugs.

Here are some things a professional pest manager will do to eliminate bed bugs:

- Conduct a thorough inspection
- Request that clutter be removed and a thorough cleaning take place
- Suggest the use of mattress encasements
- Have you launder clothing in a hot washer and dryer
- Use a high quality HEPA vacuum to remove exposed bed bugs
- Apply dry heat, steam heat, or cold to affected areas
- Carefully use pesticides known to control bed bugs

Check the WSDA [website](#) for a list of licensed PMPs. Get estimates from three companies. Interview each to make certain you understand what service will be provided. And be aware, the lowest bid may not be the best.

Here are some websites with additional information about bed bugs:

Environmental Protection Agency

<http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/bedbugs/index.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/bedbugs/>

National Pest Management Association

<http://allthingsbedbugs.pestworld.org/>

Washington State Department of Health

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/CommunityandEnvironment/Pests/BedBugs>



Bed Bugs and Blood Stains on a Mattress Seam
Photograph by Steve Rogers, Bug Busters Pest Control, Olympia, WA



Bed Bug Adult and Nymphs “Hitchhiking” on a Suitcase
Photograph by Steve Rogers, Bug Busters Pest Control, Olympia, WA



Bed Bugs and Blood Stains in an Electrical Outlet
Photograph by Steve Rogers, Bug Busters Pest Control, Olympia, WA