

# STOP BED BUGS SAFELY

## WHAT ARE BED BUGS?

Bed bugs are small insects that feed on human blood. They are usually active at night when people are sleeping. Adult bed bugs have flat rusty-red-colored oval bodies. Adult bed bugs are about the size of an apple seed, they are big enough to be easily seen, but often hide in cracks in furniture, floors, or walls. When bed bugs feed, their bodies swell and become brighter red. They can live for several months without feeding on a host.

## WHAT DOES A BED BUG BITE FEEL AND LOOK LIKE?

Most bed bug bites are initially painless, but later turn into large, itchy skin welts. These welts do *not* have a red spot in the center as do the bites from fleas.

## ARE BED BUGS DANGEROUS?

Although bed bugs and their bites are a nuisance, they are not known to spread diseases.

## HOW DOES A HOME BECOME INFESTED WITH BED BUGS?

In most cases, people carry bed bugs into their homes unknowingly, in infested luggage, furniture, bedding, or clothing. Bed bugs may also travel between apartments through small crevices and cracks in walls and floors.

## HOW DO I KNOW IF MY HOME IS INFESTED WITH BED BUGS?

You may notice itchy skin welts. You may also see the bed bugs themselves, small bloodstains from crushed insects, or dark spots from their droppings. It is often hard to find them because they hide in or near beds, other furniture, and in cracks.

## SHOULD I USE A PEST CONTROL COMPANY?

The Health Department recommends that homeowners hire pest control companies registered by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to get rid of bed bugs.

The pest control company should:

- Inspect your home to confirm the presence of bed bugs.
- Find and eliminate their hiding places.
- Treat your home with special cleaning and/or pesticides if necessary.
- Make return visits to make sure bed bugs are gone.

Be sure your pest control company hires licensed pest management professionals. Ask to see a copy of their license or check directly with DEC by calling (718) 482-4994 or visiting

<http://www.dec.ny.gov/permits/209.html>

## IS IT NECESSARY TO USE PESTICIDES TO GET RID OF BED BUGS?

The best way to get rid of bed bugs is to clean, disinfect and eliminate their hiding places. Since young bed bugs (nymphs) can live for several months without feeding and the adults for more than a year, the pest control company may use a pesticide. Talk with the professional about safe use of pesticides and make sure he/she:

- Uses the least toxic pesticide.
- Follows instructions and warnings on product labels.
- Advises you about staying out of treated rooms and when it is safe to reenter.
- Treats mattresses and sofas by applying small amounts of pesticides on seams only. Pesticides should **never** be sprayed on top of mattresses or sofas.



Actual size

Michael F. Potter, University of Kentucky ©2004

## HOW CAN I GET RID OF BED BUGS?

### 1. Find out where bed bugs are hiding in your home.

Use a bright flashlight to look for bed bugs or their dark droppings in bedroom furniture. Or use a hot hair dryer, a thin knife, an old subway card or a playing card to force them out of hiding spaces and cracks. Check:

- Behind your headboard.
- In the seams and tufts of your mattress and inside the box spring.
- Along bedroom baseboard cracks.
- In and around nightstands.
- Other bedroom items, including window and door casings, pictures, moldings, nearby furniture, loose wallpaper, cracks in plaster and partitions, and clutter.

### 2. Clean areas where bed bugs are likely to hide.

- Clean bedding, linens, curtains, rugs, carpets, and clothes. To kill bed bugs, wash items in hot water and dry them on the highest dryer setting. Soak delicate clothes in warm water with lots of laundry soap for several hours before rinsing. Wool items, plush toys, shoes, and many other items can be placed into a hot dryer for 30 minutes to get rid of bed bugs.
- Scrub mattress seams with a stiff brush to dislodge bed bugs and their eggs.
- Vacuum mattresses, bed frames, nearby furniture, floors and carpets. Pay special attention to cracks and open spaces. Immediately after vacuuming, put the vacuum cleaner bag in a sealed plastic bag, and dispose of it in an outdoor container.
- If you find bed bugs on a mattress, cover it with a waterproof, zippered mattress cover labeled “allergen rated,” or “for dust mites.” Keep the cover on for at least one year.
- If your box spring is infested, seal it inside a vinyl box spring cover for at least one year. If no cover is available, throw the box spring away.
- Dispose of infested items that cannot be cleaned and get rid of clutter. Seal tightly in a plastic garbage bag and discard in an outside container.
- Repair cracks in plaster and repair or remove loose wallpaper.

### 3. Be very cautious about using pesticides yourself.

Pesticides can be hazardous to people and pets. If you choose to use a pesticide, or a licensed pest control professional suggests you use one, follow these precautions:

- Only use pesticides clearly labeled for bed bug extermination. Never use a cockroach spray, ant spray, or any other pesticide that does not list bed bugs on the label.
- Follow label instructions exactly.
- Never spray pesticides on top of mattresses or sofas, or in areas where children or pets are present.
- Never purchase or use a product without a manufacturer’s label and never buy pesticides from street vendors.
- Avoid using “insecticide bombs” and “foggers” in your home. These products can spread hazardous chemicals throughout your home, and are not likely to be effective against bed bugs.

## HOW CAN I KEEP BED BUGS OUT OF MY HOME?

- Wash clothing and inspect luggage immediately after returning from a trip.
- Inspect used furniture for bed bugs before bringing it into your home.
- Never bring discarded bed frames, mattresses, box springs, or upholstered furniture into your home.

## HOW CAN I KEEP MY FURNITURE FROM INFESTING SOMEONE ELSE'S HOME?

- Never resell or donate infested furniture or clothing.
- If you throw infested furniture away, make it undesirable to others by cutting or poking holes in its upholstery or making it unusable. Tape a sign to it that says, “Infested with Bed Bugs.”

This fact sheet is available at [nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health). For more copies, call 311 and ask for “Stop Bed Bugs Safely.”