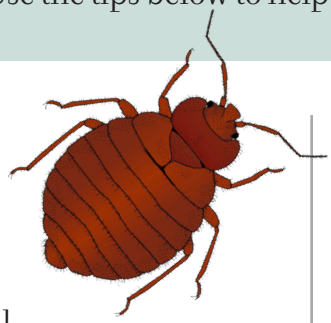
BED BUGS

A FACTSHEET FROM SAFER PEST CONTROL PROJECT

Bed bugs are making a comeback, big-time, and can be found just about anywhere–from warming shelters to four-star hotel rooms. No one really knows why they have returned, but these little bugs are determined to stick around. Although bed bugs are tiny, they can cause major headaches because they're so difficult to find. Use the tips below to help control this stubborn pest.



BIOLOGY

Understanding how bed bugs eat and live can help you get rid of them.

- Adult bed bugs are flat, small (less than ¼ inch long), oval-shaped, wingless, and reddish brown. Immature bugs are smaller and amber colored. Eggs are tiny and white.
- They feed on blood and attach themselves to their favorite meal: humans and animals. Bed bugs need blood to grow and can live **up to one year on a single feeding.**
- Bed bugs usually bite at night, while we are sleeping.
- Bed bugs move around by hitching rides on clothing, furniture, bedding, and baggage. Bed bugs will live in any crack or crevice in or around your sleeping areas.

HEALTH ISSUES

- Not known disease carriers.
- Bites can cause an allergic reaction with swelling, redness, and itching.
- Skin infection and scarring can result from scratching.
- The majority of people do not react to bed bug bites.
- Lack of sleep is a serious side-effect causing reduced allertness, loss of productivity, and mood problems.

PREVENTION

Bed bugs are hard to prevent because of their small size, night habits, and ability to hitchhike. Here are some tips to get you started:

- **Be on the look out** for signs of infestations such as: waking up with bites; seeing live bugs; or dark red or black spots on bedding, carpets, walls and furniture. Finding bed bugs early is the key to preventing their spread.
- **Paint and caulk around sleeping areas** – such as along baseboards, windows and bed frames – to seal hiding spots.
- **Inspect used furniture closely** before bringing into your home. Look for signs of infestations in cushions, zippers, seams, and underneath including springs and frames. Use a magnifying glass if possible. Beware of items in alleys and dumpsters.
- **Take a look around mattresses and funiture** when staying in an unfamiliar place. Bed bugs can hitch a ride home on your clothing or luggage.

BED BUGS (cont.)

CONTROL

Be persistent!! Getting rid of bed bugs will require many different steps over several weeks. Be patient and persistent, and you will succeed.

- **Find out where they are hiding.** Bed bugs don't just stay in mattresses (though that is a favorite hiding spot). Look along baseboards, under and behind dressers, and any other dark hidden areas nearby. Monitoring devices, like glue boards or special bed bug detectors, may be helpful with locating bed bugs.
- **Vacuum infested areas carefully.** This will quickly knock down numbers of live bugs. **Remove vacuum bag or contents**, place into a plastic bag, seal tightly, and dispose right away. Vacuuming alone will not eliminate an infestation.
- **Steam clean furniture** and other surfaces to kill remaining bugs and hidden eggs. Handheld steamers are widely available in stores and online. The steaming time depends on the steam temperature, i.e., the higher the temperature the faster the kill. Pass the steamer slowly over infested surfaces. Always use caution to avoid burns.
- **Put mattress and box spring into a bed bug proof cover.** These covers are tear resistant and have a tight locking zipper that keeps bed bugs from escaping. Leave cover on for at least one year and pull bed away from the wall. Keep bedding from touching the floor and change sheets often until the problem is eliminated.
- **Wash all linen, laundry, and other infested clothing articles in hot water.** Dry on the highest possible setting. Unwashed, unwashable, and "dry clean only" items can be put in the drier for at least 20 minutes to kill bed bugs.
- You do not have to throw away furniture, including mattresses. Most items can be treated. **Talk to your pest control professional before throwing anything out.**
- Infested items left in common areas such as alleys, basements and curbs may spread the problem to others in your community. **Mark or label any items that you are throwing out** to prevent others from accidentally bringing bed bugs home.
- **Do not use chemicals around sleeping areas** and furniture unless they are properly labeled to treat these surfaces for bed bugs.
- If you are renting, **notify your landlord about any sign of bed bug immediately**. You have the right to live in safe and decent housing. Work with your landlord to get problems corrected quickly and prevent the spread of bed bugs.

Remember, there is **no magic formula** that will guarantee bed bug elimination. These tips are not intended to replace a select treatment program by knowledgeable professionals. The use of pesticides may be necessary. If possible, seek professional advice before applying pesticides for bed bugs especially around people with health conditions.

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Safer Pest Control Project is dedicated to reducing the health risks and environmental impacts of pesticides and promoting safer alternatives in Illinois.

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