

Preventing and Getting Rid of Bed Bugs Safely

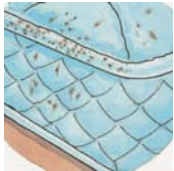
Having bed bugs in your home has become more common. Here are some questions and answers about preventing and getting rid of bed bugs.

What are Bed Bugs?



Bed bugs are small insects that feed mainly on human blood. A newly hatched bed bug is semi-transparent, light tan in color, and the size of a poppy seed. Adult bed bugs are flat, have rusty-red-colored oval bodies, and are about the size of an apple seed. Bed bugs can be easily confused with other small household insects, including carpet beetles, spider beetles and newly hatched cockroaches (nymphs).

How do I know if I have bed bugs?



Blood stains, droppings and eggs can be found in several locations including:

- Mattress seams and tufts, sheets, pillow cases and upholstered furniture.
- Crevices and cracks in furniture.
- Baseboards of walls, molding, and door frames.

What do bed bug bites look like?



Some people do not react to bed bug bites. But for those who do, bite marks may appear within minutes or days, usually where skin is exposed during sleep. They can be small bumps or large itchy welts. The welts usually go away after a few days. Because the bites may resemble mosquito and other insect bites, a bump or welt alone does not mean there are bed bugs.

How do bed bugs reproduce?

They crawl onto exposed skin, inject a mild anesthetic and suck up a small amount of blood. Most people never feel the actual bite. Bed bugs need a blood meal to grow and lay eggs. A female lays 5-7 eggs per week and if fed, will lay 200-500 eggs in her life. Eggs take about 10 days to hatch. Bed bugs are fully grown in 2 to 4 months and can live as long as a year.

Can bed bugs make me sick?

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

- Bed bug bites can be very itchy and irritating. Most welts heal in a few days but in unusual cases, the welt may persist for several weeks. Usually an anti-itching ointment will help, but if bites become infected, people should see their doctor.
- The anxiety about being bitten can lead to sleeplessness, which can affect one's wellbeing. Properly and effectively responding to bed bugs helps to keep anxiety in check.

Some people become so desperate that they use illegal or excessive amounts of pesticides that can lead to poisonings.

How can I prevent bed bugs from getting into my home?



Bed bugs can enter homes by latching onto used furniture, luggage and clothing, and by traveling along connecting pipes and wiring.

- Never bring bed frames, mattresses, box springs or upholstered furniture found on the street into your home.
- Check all used or rented furniture for bed bugs.
- When traveling, inspect the bed and furniture. Keep suitcases off the floor and bed, and inspect them before you leave.
- If you suspect you have been around bed bugs, immediately wash and dry your clothing on hot settings or store it in a sealed plastic bag until you can.
- Seal cracks and crevices with caulk, even if you don't have bed bugs. This will help prevent bed bugs and other pests from coming in.



How do I get rid of bed bugs?

If you have bed bugs, you shouldn't feel ashamed. Anyone can get bed bugs. Notify your landlord and neighbors. The sooner everyone responds, the more successful everyone will be.

There are things a professional pest control company (exterminator) can do to get rid of bed bugs:

Bed bug infestations usually require the services of well-trained, licensed pest management professionals, also called exterminators. There are many pest control companies and licensed pest professionals. Not all are well trained in managing bed bugs. To get rid of bed bugs, you must choose the right company, be clear about what you want done and monitor performance.

BUT MOST IMPORTANT: YOU MUST PREP FOR TREATMENT OR IT WILL NOT WORK! For more information [click here](#).

To choose a good professional...

- Find a company through dependable referrals, directories, and professional associations. 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. Be sure your pest control company hires licensed pest management professionals. Ask to see a copy of their license or check directly with the DEC by calling (845) 256-3097 or visiting www.dec.ny.gov/permits/209.html.

For complaints regarding fraud or unfair dealings, or to check on the status of a company's license or to learn about their complaint history, call the Rockland County Office of Consumer Protection at (845) 708-7600.

- Interview several companies before choosing. Ask about their training, and their approach to controlling bed bugs.
- Make sure they follow the procedures described in this guide.
- Agree on a service plan and its cost. Expect at least two treatment visits and a third follow-up visit to confirm that bed bugs have been eliminated. Severe infestations or cluttered apartments may take more visits to eliminate bed bugs.

A good company will...

- Inspect your property before giving you a price quote or begin any pesticide application.
- Give you a written inspection report, and an action plan of how to prepare for treatment and prevent further infestation.
- Base quotes on inspection findings, not flat fees. The cheapest services are rarely the best.
- Visit often until the job is done.
- Employ qualified, well-trained pest management professionals.
- Educate you on how to prevent bed bugs.
- Work with you until the bed bugs are gone.
- Treat you with respect.

Only professionals should apply pesticides for bed bugs. Foggers and bug bombs are not effective against bed bugs.

Ask the professional:

- What methods they use, such as chemicals, heat or cryogenic freezing process. Also, some companies have bed bug sniffing dogs that can identify where the bed bugs can be found.

If they use pesticides, they should:

- Use the least-toxic pesticide labeled for bed bugs that will be effective
- Follow all instructions and warnings on product labels.
- Tell you when it's safe to re-enter a treated room.
- Never spray the top of mattresses or sofas, and if needed, to use only small amounts of pesticides on their seams only.

To report, or ask about pesticide exposures, call the:

Poison Help Hotline: 1-800-222-1222

(24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year)

For more information about pesticide products, call the

National Pesticide Information Center: 1-800-858-7378

(6:30AM to 4:30PM Pacific time, daily, and via e-mail at npic@ace.orst.edu)

There are things you can do to get rid of bed bugs:

Everyone should learn how to identify bed bugs and inspect for them. Cleaning and disinfecting will help to reduce bed bugs and their spread but may not get rid of them totally.

How to trap and kill bed bugs:



- Force bed bugs out of cracks and crevices with a putty knife or an old credit card or playing card, or with hot air from a blow-dryer on low setting. Catch them with sticky packing tape or crush them in paper towels. The heat from blow-dryers will kill bed bugs after 30 seconds of continuous contact.

How to clean and disinfect:



- Get rid of clutter to reduce places bed bugs can hide. After checking them for bed bugs, consider putting non-essential belongings into sealed plastic bags and store until the bed bugs are gone from your home. Check all items again before returning.
- Wipe off dead bugs, blood stains, eggs and droppings with hot soapy water.
- Wash all items showing bed bug stains in hot water (140° F) and dry on the highest setting for at least 20 minutes. Other clean items suspected of having bed bugs should be placed in

a hot dryer for at least 20 minutes to kill bed bugs. After drying, store items in sealed plastic bags until you are sure you have gotten rid of bed bugs.

- Vacuum carpets, floors, bed frames, furniture, cracks and crevices daily, using the brush and crevice tools.
- Empty the vacuum or seal and dispose of its bag outside of your home after each use.
- Enclose infested mattresses and box springs in a cover that is labeled “allergen rated,” “for dust mites,” or “for bed bugs” for at least a full year. Periodically check for rips or openings and tape these up.

How to seal cracks and crevices:

- Repair cracks in plaster, repair or remove any loose wallpaper and tighten light switch covers.
- Apply caulk to seal crevices and joints in baseboards and gaps on shelving or cabinets.

How to get rid of infested items:



- Usually you do not need to get rid of furniture or bedding at the first signs of bed bugs. Cleaning and enclosing is often adequate.
- Box springs should only be thrown out if they cannot be covered and are full of bed bugs. Box spring and mattress can be sealed in plastic cover with duct tape over the zipper.
- Use plastic sheeting (shrink/pallet wrap) or place securely in plastic bags any items to be thrown away. Label with a sign that says “infested with bed bugs.”

**For complaints about bed bugs, call the
Rockland County Department of Health at (845) 364-2585**

**For additional information, including brochures and fact sheets,
and for information in other languages:**

Rockland County Department of Health “Stop Bed Bugs Safely” fact sheet

English <http://www.co.rockland.ny.us/health/pdf/BedBugs.pdf>

Español http://www.co.rockland.ny.us/health/pdf/BedBugs_Spanish.pdf

Creole <http://www.co.rockland.ny.us/health/pdf/BedBugsCreole.pdf>

New York State Department of Health www.health.ny.gov/environmental/pests/bedbugs.htm

New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene <http://home2.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/vector/vector-faq1.shtml>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/Topics/bedbugs.htm>

Adapted from the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
“Preventing and Getting Rid of Bed Bugs Safely: A Guide for Property Owners, Managers and Tenants.”