If I Find Bed Bugs, What Should I Do?

If you have found and confirmed bed bugs in your home, follow these simple steps.

DO NOT:

Do Not panic. Remember that these pests are not life threatening. It is likely that they have been present for some time. They reproduce quite slowly, so you have time to organize and develop a logical yet aggressive treatment strategy.

Do Not assume that they are present because of uncleanliness or poor housekeeping. These are parasites of people and may be found wherever people live.

Do Not automatically discard furniture or other items. This is often unnecessary and moving furniture often leads to spreading bed bugs. Start with infested areas and take as much care as possible when removing infested items.

Do Not purchase or use chemicals that are not labeled for Bed Bug control. Home remedies and concoctions are likely to have little effect on the bed bugs but can have detrimental health effects on you, your family or your home.

DO:

Remain calm. Know that bed bugs, although difficult to control, can be eradicated from your home if you follow a well thought out and executed plan.

Inspect and monitor. Determine where and how widespread the infestation is. Use of traps such as Climb-Up Interceptors® is an efficient method of monitoring.

Intensify cultural practices. Clean, launder, vacuum, remove clutter. Do not move furniture from room to room. Maintain good travel practices. Remember that just like you would not want others to bring clutter into your house, be sure that you give others the same respect. Use steam treatments, mattress encasements, and inorganic powder treatments as part of your treatment strategy.

Contact a professional pest manager who has experience in controlling bed bugs using integrated pest management. Work closely with them in preparing the home for treatments and in following up afterwards. Researchers have found that how residents work and cooperate with the pest control provider can make the difference afterwards. Researchers have found that how residents work and cooperate with the pest control provider can make the difference afterwards. Researchers have found that how residents work and cooperate with the pest control provider can make the difference afterwards.

The management professional will inspect to determine the location of the infestation and how large it is. Bedding and infested materials should be laundered at the time of treatment and on a regular basis afterwards, using hot water, soap, and hot temperature clothes dryers. Stuffed animals, backpacks, and shoes can be treated the same.

What Can I Expect From A Pest Control Professional?

First, understand that control of an infestation can be difficult and will require time. Professional pest managers are trained to apply treatments that involve heat or pesticides. During the control process, total cooperation from the resident or homeowner is needed. A pest management professional will inspect to determine the location of the infestation and how large it is. Bedding and infested materials should be laundered at the time of treatment and on a regular basis afterwards, using hot water, soap, and hot temperature clothes dryers. Stuffed animals, backpacks, and shoes can be treated the same.

How Can I Help Get The Bugs Out?

Non-chemical treatments are often also necessary to eliminate the infestation whether used alone or in conjunction with professional chemical control methods. These are often best applied by the homeowner or resident. Two excellent non-chemical methods are (1) using mattress and box spring encasements and (2) using steam machines. Encasements are designed to fit around a mattress or a box spring. They are zippered shut and will contain bed bugs that are located inside. They also will prevent bed bugs from entering the mattress. Encasements improve control and reduce the risk of spread, but they will not eliminate an infestation, especially if bed bugs are located in any other place. Steam machines and heat treatments are effective for killing bed bugs. Reduce clutter to improve detection and treatment effectiveness.

What Do Bed Bugs Look Like?

Bed bugs are typically reddish brown in color. Their color varies with respect to age and feeding state. Adult bed bugs are 1/4” long and have six legs. Their flattened body shape allows them to hide in small nooks and crannies in the bed, the furniture where people may sleep, or areas very close by such as baseboards, electrical outlets, and even inside appliances.

Where Are Bed Bugs Found?

Bed bugs are found throughout the world. They are closely associated with people and can live wherever people spend a lot of time, such as hotels, dorms, homes, apartment buildings, long term care facilities, schools and hospitals. Bed bugs are concentrated in areas where people sleep. Their flattened body shape allows them to hide in small nooks and crannies in the bed, the furniture where people may sleep, or areas very close by such as baseboards, electrical outlets, and even inside appliances.

Bed bug infestation on a night stand

Bed bug adult
Bed bug engorged after a blood meal

Bed bug welt on skin after a bite

Collecting bed bugs from a mattress

Inspecting upholstered furniture with a flashlight

How Do Bed Bugs Spread?

Bed bugs are excellent hitchhikers. They can easily move from an infested building to a new site as people move. The recent resurgence of bed bugs is due in large part to international travel. Bed bugs hitchhike on luggage or on personal items or clothing and can move from one country to another in a very short period of time. Within a community, bed bugs can spread when people move infested possessions into a new apartment or home. Purchasing infested, second-hand beds or other furniture has been shown to accelerate local outbreaks of bed bugs.

Once inside a building bed bugs can move between rooms or apartments by walking or crawling via hallways, or by squeezing through tiny cracks in common walls, ceilings, or utility ports. Bed bugs squeeze into folds and crevices of mattresses, box springs, and stuffed furniture and crevices where bed bugs may hide. Look closely for bugs in the cracks and crevices on or near your bed, along mattress seams, folds or in cracks in the bed frame.

How Do I Know If I Have Bed Bugs?

Bed bug welt on skin after a bite

Inspecting upholstered furniture with a flashlight

How Do I Protect Myself From Bed Bugs While Traveling?

Be alert and aware when travelling. If you suspect bed bug infestations, use common sense and what you know about bed bugs to help avoid bringing them home with you. Inspect your hotel room for signs of an infestation before you move your belongings in. Some travelers will place their luggage in the bathtub or on a wooden chair or desk rather than on a bed while they perform this inspection. Carefully inspect the mattress seams, headboard, and furniture around the bed for fecal specks, cast skins, or live bed bugs. If bed bugs or signs of bed bug feeding are found, immediately report this to the registration desk, and ask for a different room. When returning home, carefully check luggage seams and clothing for any signs of bed bugs before bringing it into your home. Clothing can be immediately washed and dried to help avoid bringing them home with you. Be very careful about purchasing or bringing home second-hand upholstered furniture and clothing.

Bed bugs can carry drug resistant bacteria (MRSA) on their bodies. The most valuable form of home protection is becoming aware of the threat of bed bugs. Understand where and how they travel. Know what they look like and how to inspect for them. Be very careful about purchasing or bringing home second-hand upholstered furniture and clothing. Always closely inspect items for signs of infestation. Launder any items that can be laundered in hot soapy water and dry with hot air. Bed bugs will not survive this regime. Make vacuuming, cleaning, decluttering and inspecting a regular habit. Steam or heat treatments must be applied to anything that is suspect, before it enters the house. Steam or heat treatments must be applied to anything that is suspect, before it enters the house.

How Can I Prevent Bed Bugs From Entering My Home?

Fecal specks are indications of a bed bug infestation

The most valuable form of home protection is becoming aware of the threat of bed bugs. Understand where and how they travel. Know what they look like and how to inspect for them. Bed bugs are found in furniture and clothing. Always closely inspect items for signs of infestation. Launder any items that can be laundered in hot soapy water and dry with hot air. Bed bugs will not survive this regime. Make vacuuming, cleaning, decluttering and inspecting a regular habit. Steam or heat treatments must be applied to anything that is suspect, before it enters the house.

Bed bugs feed on human blood. They take blood from sleeping people by inserting their mouthparts through the skin and sucking out small portions of blood. Bed bug feeding has not been proven as a means of transmitting diseases; however recent research has shown that bed bugs can carry drug resistant bacteria (MRSA) on their bodies. The most serious result of bed bug feeding is the emotional anguish that is associated with this parasite. The thought of a bed bug feeding on a sleeping person can translate into sleeplessness or into obsessive behavioral compulsions that can be worse than the bed bug bite.

Do Bed Bugs Hurt Me?

Bed bugs feed on exposed skin (neck, arms, legs, etc.) while a person is sleeping. Reaction to the bites varies widely from person to person. Bed bug feeding is the emotional anguish that is associated with this parasite. The thought of a bed bug feeding on a sleeping person can translate into sleeplessness or into obsessive behavioral compulsions that can be worse than the bed bug bite.