

# MEDfacts

An Educational Health Series From National Jewish Health®



## Increasing Your Bed Bug Awareness

Bed bugs are increasingly infesting areas where people sleep and spend time in the United States. These areas may include homes, apartments, hotels, dorm rooms, hospitals, homeless shelters and schools. There may be a number of reasons for this. These include:

- Increased national and international travel,
- Bed bug resistance to available pesticides and
- Decreased awareness of bed bug prevention and infestation.

### What are bed bugs?

Bed bugs are a type of insect that feeds on blood. They bite humans to obtain blood for growth. Unlike some other biting bugs, bed bugs don't transmit disease when they bite.

In one to two months an egg can grow through several stages to become an adult bed bug. Bed bugs are active at night.

### What do bed bugs look like?

It is important to know what bed bugs look like in the various stages of developments. An adult bed bug can lay 4 to 5 eggs a day. The eggs are a clear to white color and about 1 mm long.

As bed bugs develop over one to two months they become a darker color with darker stripes. An adult bed bug is oval to round shape and may be 1 to 7 mm in length.



**Photo 1. Bed Bug. Photo courtesy of Dr. Harold Harlan, Armed Forces Pest Management Board Image Library**

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### How do bed bugs infest an environment?

Bed bugs can infest an environment when a bed bug is brought from an infested area into an environment that is not infested. Bed bug infestation can occur in any area where people sleep and spend time. Bed bug infestation is not related to cleanliness.

### How can you tell if you have bed bugs?

Awareness of bed bugs is important.

- Know what bed bugs look like in various stages of development.
- Know where to look for bed bugs. In areas where people sleep or spend time bed bugs may hide in the creases of a mattress, behind picture frames and bed frames and in cracks in the wall and floorboards.
- Know what remnants of bed bugs to look for. Bed bugs are active at night so you may also see remnants of bed bugs during the day. There may be dark spots or droppings, skin sheddings of bed bugs, eggs and possibly drops of blood.



**Photo 3. Bed Bug Exoskeletons. Photo courtesy of Dr. Harold Harlan, Armed Forces Pest Management . Board Image Library**

- Know what bed bug bites look like. Bed bug bites on the skin are also an indication that bed bugs may be present. Bed bug bites may look like raised welts. They often itch. People react differently to bed bug bites. Some people develop a small welt while some develop a bigger welt. Several bites may occur in a row.



**Photo 2. Skin Reaction to Bed Bug bites. Photo courtesy of Dr. Harold Harlan**

If these indications of bed bugs are identified, the environment may need to be inspected by a pest control professional that is familiar with bed bugs.

If you show any of these signs of bed bug exposure you may be asked to reschedule your appointment.

## How can you prevent a bed bugs infestation?

### When at home:

- Be aware to what signs of bed bugs to watch for.
- Check areas of the home after you have houseguests.
- Watch for signs of bedbugs when children return from college, camp or overnights.
- Avoid purchasing or renting used furniture. If you do purchase or rent used furniture, check it closely before bringing it into your home.
- Encase the mattress and box springs in dust proof mattress encasings.
- Seal any cracks in the home.

### When you travel:

- Check for bed bugs when you stay at hotels.
- Keep suitcases off the floor or bed. Inspect the suitcase before bringing it into your home.
- If you suspect there may be bed bugs in your luggage leave the suitcase outside. Place any clothes in a plastic bag or leave them outside until you can wash them in hot water.

## What can you do if you have a bed bug infestation?

There are specific treatments that are helpful, but treatment can be difficult and often needs to be repeated. The earlier the infestation is identified, the easier the treatment becomes. Although cleanliness isn't an indicator for bed bug infestations, treatment can be more difficult when rooms are more cluttered.

Consulting a reputable pest control specialist who is familiar with bed bugs is important. Consider interviewing several companies before you select one.

**Remember, increasing your awareness of bed bugs can help you prevent, identify and treat an infestation early.**

Note: This information is provided to you as an educational service of LUNG LINE® (1-800-222-LUNG). It is not meant to be a substitute for consulting with your own physician.

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