

# PROTECTING YOUR HOME FROM BED BUGS

Remember the nursery rhyme- *Good Night, Sleep Tight, and Don't Let the Bed Bugs Bite*? No longer is this just a nursery rhyme. Bedbugs are considered to be public health pests by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). Recent complaints about bed bugs are increasing and have prompted a joint statement on bed bug control by the CDC and the EPA.

## Description

The common bed bug (*Cimex Lectularius*) is a parasite with a preference for feeding on humans. Bed bugs are straw-colored, flat, oval-shaped, and wingless. Adult bed bugs are ¼ to 3/8 inches long, but become bloated and dark red after feeding. They feed for about three to five minutes at night while the host sleeps. After feeding, they crawl to a sheltered crevice where they'll remain for several days while digesting the meal. They can survive for weeks to months without feeding. The typical life span is 10 months.

## Bites

Bed bugs tend to bite all over the body, especially on the areas that are more exposed while we sleep (such as arms, hands, neck and face). A small, hard swollen, white welt may develop at the site of each bite. The bite is accompanied by severe itching that lasts for several hours to days. Scratching may cause the welts to become infected. Sometimes their bites are mistaken for flea or mosquito bites. Although these bites are irritating, bedbugs are not known to transmit diseases.

## Habits

Bedbugs usually come out at night or in darkened areas. During the day they prefer to hide close to where people sleep. They can hide in a variety of places including around the bed, near the piping, seams, and tags of the mattresses and box springs and in cracks on the bed frame and head board. Bedbugs often crawl upward to hide in pictures, wall hangings, drapery, pleats, loosened wallpaper, cracks in plaster and ceiling moldings.

## Transport

They can be transported from infested areas to non-infested areas on clothing, furniture, luggage, and bedding, so if bedbugs are suspected thoroughly examine the room and/or items. Use a flashlight to look behind and underneath furniture and woodwork. Look under all items that are attached to the wall. Check seams, creases, tufts, and folds of mattresses and box springs. Inspect new and used furniture before bringing it inside. Look in narrow spaces, under folds of cloth and cushions.

## Control and Prevention

Bedbugs can be difficult to get rid of and challenging to control because they hide so well, but there are some measures that can be taken. In general, it is a good idea to consult a qualified pest management

professional or licensed pest controller, especially for large infestations; however, non-chemical approaches can also be taken for smaller bedbug concerns.

The use of hot air can kill bedbugs with the heat generated. Wash clothes and bed linens in hot water and dry on high temperatures to kill bedbugs. Infested items that are too large for a washer or dryer can be wrapped up in black plastic and placed directly in the sun (113 degrees for 1 hour). Delicate materials can also be placed into the freezer (0 degrees for four days). EPA reports that the higher or the cooler the temperature, the less time needed to kill bedbugs.

Although vacuuming will not get rid of bed bugs, a good vacuum job may remove particles from cracks and crevices to encourage greater insecticide penetration. You can vacuum furniture, bed frame, floor, baseboards, etc. Be sure to discard bag in a sealed plastic bag when finished.

Use encasements on mattresses, box springs and pillows to help detect infestations and eliminate hiding spots. Make your bed an island- this involves moving your bed from the wall and making sure that linen/bedding doesn't touch the floor. You should also seal crevices that might serve as hiding spots for bed bugs.

Dr. Michael Potter, Professor and Urban Entomologist, states that while the aforementioned efforts are helpful, insecticides are important for bed bug elimination. Bed bugs are treated using a variety of low-odor sprays, dusts, and aerosols. Baits designed to control for ants and cockroaches are ineffective. Application entails treating all areas where the bugs are discovered or tend to crawl and hide. This may take several hours of effort and follow up visits are usually required.

There may be some items that may need to be discarded if the infestation is extensive and/or if preventive measures aren't working. When infested items are discarded, be sure to bag or wrap them to prevent dislodgement of bugs en route to the dumpster.

## **Myths**

Common Bed bug Myths (Environmental Protection Agency):

- You can't see a bed bug
  - o You should be able to see an adult bed bug, nymphs (metamorphosis stage) and eggs with your naked eye
- Bed bugs live in dirty places
  - o Bed bugs are not attracted to dirt and grime; they are attracted to warmth, blood and carbon dioxide. However, clutter offers more hiding spots.
- Bed bugs transmit diseases
  - o There are no cases that indicate bed bugs pass diseases from one host to another. Lab tests have shown that it is unlikely that the insect is capable of infecting its host.
- Bed bugs won't come out if the room is brightly lit
  - o While bed bugs prefer darkness, keeping the light on at night won't deter these pests from biting you.
- Pesticide applications alone will easily eliminate bed bug infestations
  - o Bed bug control can only be maintained through a comprehensive treatment strategy that incorporates a variety of techniques and vigilant monitoring. Proper use of pesticides may be one component of the strategy, but will not eliminate bed bugs alone.

In addition, bed bug populations in different geographic areas of the country have developed resistance to many pesticidal modes of action. If you're dealing with a resistant population, some products and application methods may only serve to make the problem worse.

In case of an emergency, call Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222

### **References**

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