

March 2008

## Bed Bugs

### What are bed bugs?

Bed bugs are insects that, as adults, have oval-shaped bodies with no wings. Prior to feeding, they are about 1/4 inch long and flat as paper. After feeding, they turn dark red and become bloated. Eggs are whitish, pear-shaped and about the size of a pinhead. Clusters of 10-50 eggs can be found in cracks and crevices. Bed bugs have a one-year life span during which time a female can lay 200-400 eggs depending on food supply and temperature. Eggs hatch in about 10 days.



### What do bed bugs feed on?

Bed bugs prefer to feed on human blood, but will also bite mammals and birds. Bed bugs bite at night, and will bite all over a human body, especially around the face, neck, upper torso, arms and hands. Bed bugs can survive up to six months without feeding. Both male and female bed bugs bite.

### Can I get sick from bed bugs?

There are no known cases of infectious disease transmitted by bed bug bites. Most people are not aware that they have been bitten but some people are more sensitive to the bite and may have a localized reaction. Scratching the bitten areas can lead to infection.

### How do bed bugs get into my home?

Bed bugs are often carried into a home on objects such as furniture and clothing. If you think you have a bed bug problem, check for live bed bugs or shells in the following areas:

- Seams, creases, tufts and folds of mattresses and box springs
- Cracks in the bed frame and head board
- Under chairs, couches, beds, dust covers
- Between the cushions of couches and chairs
- Under area rugs and the edges of carpets
- Between the folds of curtains
- In drawers
- Behind baseboards, and around window and door casings
- Behind electrical plates and under loose wallpaper, paintings and posters
- In cracks in plaster
- In telephones, radios, and clocks

Bed bugs can also travel from apartment to apartment along pipes, electrical wiring and other openings. If the infestation is heavy, a sweet smell may be noticed in the room.

### **What can I do if I have bed bugs in my home?**

The best method to deal with bed bugs is Integrated Pest Management (IPM), which combines a variety of techniques and products that pose the least risk to human health and the environment.

1. Consult with your local health department or a professional Pest Control operator to confirm that you have bed bugs.
2. Inspect your mattress and bed frame, particularly the folds, crevices and the underside, and other locations where bed bugs like to hide.
3. Use a nozzle attachment on the vacuum to capture the bed bugs and their eggs. Vacuum all crevices on your mattress, bed frame, baseboards and any objects close to the bed. It is essential to vacuum daily and empty the vacuum immediately.
4. Wash all your linens in the hottest water possible and place them in a hot dryer for 20 minutes. Consider covering your pillows and mattress with a plastic cover.
5. Remove all unnecessary clutter.
6. Seal cracks and crevices between baseboards, on wood bed frames, floors and walls with caulking. Repair or remove peeling wallpaper, tighten loose light switch covers, and seal any openings where pipes, wires or other utilities come into your home (pay special attention to walls that are shared between apartments).
7. Monitor daily by setting out glue boards or sticky tape (carpet tape works well) to catch the bed bugs. Closely examine any items that you are bringing into your home.
8. Consult professional pest control services and discuss options that pose the least risk to humans and the environment.

If you choose to treat the infestation with an insecticide, call a Professional Pest Control Service for more information. Use the least toxic product available and follow all manufacturers' instructions.

Whether you choose Integrated Pest Management or insecticides, you may continue to see some living bed bugs for up to ten days. This is normal. If you continue to see a large number of bed bugs after two weeks, contact a professional pest control service.

### **What do bed bug bites look like?**

When bed bugs bite people, they inject their saliva into the biting area, causing the skin to become irritated and inflamed. Individual responses to bed bug bites will vary. The skin lesion from bed bug bites may go unnoticed, or be mistaken for flea or mosquito bites or other skin conditions.



Four types of skin rashes have been described in the literature:

1. The most common rash is made up of localized red and itchy flat lesions. The classical bed bug bites could be presented in a linear fashion in a group of three, which is called "breakfast, lunch, and dinner".
2. Small raised red swelling lesions are also common.
3. In rare cases, people may develop large raised, often itchy, red welts.

4. In people with high sensitivity to bed bug saliva, people may develop a lump filled with blood or fluid.

Bed bug bites most commonly occur on exposed areas of the body, including face, neck, hands, arms, lower legs or all over the body.

### **How do I treat bed bug bites?**

Most bed bug bites go away by themselves and don't need treatment. Keep the skin clean and try not to scratch. If the bites are very itchy, your doctor may prescribe cream or antihistamines to relieve the itchiness. Oral antibiotics may be prescribed for any secondary skin infection from excessive scratching.

### **How do I prevent bed bugs from entering my home?**

- Although even the cleanest homes and hotels can have bed bugs, regular house cleaning, including vacuuming your mattress, can help to prevent an infestation. Clean up clutter to help reduce the number of places bed bugs can hide.
- Be careful when buying used furniture or clothes. Make sure to inspect the used item, and feel free to ask the retailer if the items were checked for bed bugs.
- Use caution when bringing home used furniture or clothes from the curb side. These items may be infested with bed bugs.
- When travelling take the following precautions:
  - **Inspect the room and furniture:** inspect all cracks and crevices of the mattress and box spring, and look for blood spots or live insects. Request a different room if you find evidence of bed bugs.
  - **Protect your luggage:** keep all belongings in your luggage and wrap your luggage in plastic to help prevent bed bugs from entering your luggage. Keep luggage on the shelf or away from the floor.
  - **Protect the bed:** move the bed away from the wall, tuck in all bed sheets and keep blankets from touching the floor.
  - **Upon returning home:** keep your luggage in an isolated area of your home, such as the garage. Inspect the luggage. Wash all your clothes in the hottest water possible and put them in a hot dryer for 20 minutes.

### **For more information:**

- Toronto Public Health – [www.toronto.ca/health](http://www.toronto.ca/health) or 416-338-7600
- Effective Control of Bed Bugs, Health Canada, Pest Management Regulatory Agency - [http://www.pmra-arla.gc.ca/english/consum/bed\\_bugs-e.html#2](http://www.pmra-arla.gc.ca/english/consum/bed_bugs-e.html#2)