

Good Night, Sleep Tight and Don't let the Bed Bugs Bite!

Bed bugs, that pest from the old bedtime rhyme Sleep tight. Don't let the bed bugs bite, are making a comeback. Bed bugs hang about where you least expect. Their flat bodies enable them to hide in dark, cozy cracks and crevices in beds, baseboards, sofas, and drawers, and even behind wallpaper and electrical switchplates. Bed bugs are well-adapted to living with humans. Like other successful parasites, they prefer to live near their next meal. --you -- at night. Amazingly, these sneaky little bloodsuckers dine on you without causing you to lose sleep. The next morning, you'll discover lesions that resemble the bite of a mosquito or some other insect.

So what are bed bugs?

Adult bed bugs are oval, wingless, 1/4 to 3/8 inch (4-5 mm) long and rusty red or mahogany in color. When full of blood, their body becomes swollen and the color changes to dark red. All bed bugs have 6 legs; adult ticks and spiders have 8 legs.

Should I be concerned about bed bug bites?

Bed bugs usually feed at night when people are asleep. They will bite all over a human body, especially around the face, neck, upper torso, arms and hands. Each bed bug need 3 – 15 minutes to feed. Both male and female bed bugs bite. Bed bugs feed mainly on the blood of humans, but also suck blood from other animals, including birds and bats. There are currently no known cases of disease associated with bed bug bites.

Bed bugs suck blood from their host with piercing mouthparts. The biting is usually not felt, but later there is an allergic reaction to the protein found in the bed bug's saliva. A colorless lump develops at the bite location. Scratching the bitten areas may lead to infection. Discomfort from bed bug bites may last a week or more. Bedbug bites do not usually require any treatment. Apply local antiseptic lotion or antibiotic cream or ointment if secondary infection occurs. Reaction to bed bug bites depends on the individual. Bites can be painless and undetectable in some people, but others may be quite sensitive to bites. People who are more sensitive to the bite can have localized allergic reactions.

How do bed bugs get inside our homes?

It may seem that a bed bug infestation comes from nowhere. Since bed bugs are wingless, they must crawl or be carried from infested areas to uninfested areas. Occasionally, common bed bugs may be picked up in theaters, or on buses and trains, but usually they become established in structures when they hitch a ride in boxes, baggage, furniture, bedding, laundry, and, in and on clothing worn by people coming from infested sites. They may also migrate between homes via wires, plumbing or rain gutters. Once inside a bed bug hides in cracks and crevices, close to areas where people sleep.

What are the things I can do to prevent bed bugs from getting into my home?

Proactive measures can go a long way in preventing bed bugs from getting inside your home. Remove debris from around the house, repair cracks in walls, and caulk windows

and doors. Be cautious of getting rental or secondhand beds, bedding, and furniture, and examine these items carefully before bringing them inside. If buying a used mattress they are required to have tags on the mattress stating when and where they were sanitized. Don't pick up mattresses from curbsides. If staying in countries where bed bugs are common, keep your luggage off the floor. When returning, before unpacking, leave luggage in the trunk of your car for a few hours bed bug eggs, nymphs, and adults will be killed when exposed to high temperatures. Infested clothing and luggage can also be set outside during cold weather to kill all stages of bed bugs.

What can I do to get rid of bed bugs when they are in my home?

The fastest way to reduce bed bugs is to throw out infested items. But if that is not possible, inspect your mattress and bed frame, particularly the folds, crevices and the underside. Routine vacuuming is seldom of much benefit against bed bugs because they hide in places where normal housecleaning efforts do not reach. If bed bugs have a weakness, it's elevated temperature which can be obtained by steaming. Temperatures of about 120°F are lethal to most insects provided they cannot escape to a cooler location. The advantage of steam is that heating is intense and immediate, killing both bugs and eggs on contact. Wash all your linens and place them in a hot dryer for 20 minutes. Consider covering your pillows and mattress with a plastic cover.

Chemical Approaches: Do not spray pesticides on your mattresses as they are not safe to sleep on. Steri fab and Bedlam are often used to treat bed bug-infested beds and upholstered furniture. Although both products are technically pesticides, some companies choose to use them because of they are lasting when treating human contact surfaces. Steri fab and Bedlam contain mainly alcohol. Both products can be purchased through a variety of vendors on the internet or call 1-800-428-9512, a NJ Authorized Distributor of Steri fab by contacting a local exterminator.

For more information please contact Jeanne Garbarino from the Vineland Health Department at 856-794-4000 *4326.

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*Source: WebMD