Bedbugs

What Are Bedbugs?

Bedbugs are small, flat, reddish-brown bugs about the size of an apple seed. They can be found all over the world. Bedbugs hide during the day in or around beds and crevices in chairs, couches, curtains, rugs, dressers, and even in cracks of walls and floors and behind wallpaper.

They come out at night to find food, which in their case means blood. Bedbugs have a special ingredient in their saliva (spit) that keeps blood from clotting while they feed, typically at night in areas where people sleep. After their blood meal, bedbugs don't stay on a person for long. Instead, they hide nearby, often in clothing or luggage, allowing them to spread when belongings move to another location.

What Are the Signs of Bedbugs?

A person does not usually feel the actual bedbug bite. Afterward, the bite will feel itchy. Bedbug bites look like little red bumps (similar to mosquito bites) and they can sometimes happen in a line on the body. The bites are mainly on areas of skin that are exposed while sleeping.

Bedbugs are a nuisance, but they don't spread germs or diseases.

How Do People Get Bedbugs?

Some people believe that a dirty room will bring bedbugs, but this is not true. Bedbugs can live anywhere as long as they have food. If a room is cluttered, it helps them to hide. But clutter itself won't attract them.

Bedbugs are commonly seen in places that have a high guest turnover, such as hotels, hospitals, or nursing homes. But they can be found in many other places, such as on public transportation, in apartment buildings, and in dorms. They travel from place to place on clothing, furniture, and luggage.

How Do I Know if It's Bedbugs?

Bedbug bites can look similar to other bug bites, like mosquito bites or chigger bites.

To know it's bedbugs, it's important to find the bugs themselves. Look at bedsheets and mattresses for little spots of blood, rusty-looking stains (crushed bugs), or black dots (bugs' poop). You might see live bugs around the seams or tags of mattresses and box springs, or in cracks of bed frames and other furniture. They can even hide in books, carpet edges, and electrical outlets.

How Are Bedbug Bites Treated?

If you think someone in your family has been bitten by a bedbug, wash the bites with soap and water. Calamine lotion, an anti-itch cream, or cool compresses can help with the itching. In some cases, an antihistamine by mouth can ease itching. Bites clear up in 1–2 weeks.

Tell kids not to scratch a bedbug bite because doing so can cause a skin infection, such as impetigo and, rarely, cellulitis. If an infection does happen, a doctor will prescribe antibiotics to treat it.

How Can I Prevent Bedbugs?

If your home has bedbugs, don't feel bad. Bedbug infestations are common. These tips can help:

- Keep your home uncluttered so bedbugs won't have places to hide.

- Change bedsheets once a week and vacuum floors regularly.
- If you find bedbugs, wash all bedding, clothing, and stuffed animals in hot water and dry on a hot setting.
- Use a mattress cover that's labeled "anti-allergy" or "anti-dust mites" to help prevent bugs from getting into your bedding, and to more easily see them if they are there.
- You also can contact local pest control companies to ask about ways to get rid of bedbugs with or without pesticides.

Travel Tips
Because you're most likely to encounter bedbugs while traveling, it's wise to plan ahead. Some websites let travelers search for bedbug infestation reports by city (and sometimes by hotel), so do a little research before you leave home.

At your destination, do a bedbug check of every room before settling in. If you find any signs of bedbugs, ask for other rooms and inspect them too. If you still see signs of bedbugs, find another place to stay.

Keep luggage off the floor and beds in hotel rooms. Use the luggage racks most hotels and motels provide or put suitcases on a table or desk. Hang up clothes whenever possible, and when you get back home, dump dirty clothes right into the washing machine.

At Home
Be careful when you buy used clothing or furniture from garage sales or thrift stores. Always inspect them for bedbugs. Also, don't grab a discarded couch or other upholstered furniture off the street corner. They might have bedbugs hiding in the fabric. In fact, that might be why the previous owner got rid of them!

If you've been in a place known to have bedbugs, make sure to wash your clothes with hot water when you return home. If you can't wash your clothing right away, put it in a sealed plastic bag until you can wash it.

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