

BED BUGS

Bedbugs are small, reddish-brown parasitic insects that bite the exposed skin of sleeping humans and animals to feed on their blood. Although bedbugs aren't known to spread disease, they can cause other public health and economic issues.

About the size of an apple seed, bedbugs hide in the cracks and crevices of beds, box springs, headboards, bed frames and any other objects around a bed. The risk of encountering bedbugs increases if you spend time in places with high turnovers of nighttime guests — such as hotels, hospitals or homeless shelters.

If you have bedbugs in your home, professional extermination is recommended.

SYMPTOMS

It can be difficult to distinguish bedbug bites from other insect bites or rashes. In general, the sites of bedbug bites usually are:

- Red, often with a darker red spot in the middle
- Itchy
- Arranged in a rough line or in a cluster
- Located on the face, neck, arms and hands

Some people have no reaction to bedbug bites, while others experience an allergic reaction that can include severe itching, blisters or hives.

HOW DO THEY SPREAD?

Bedbugs can move from one site to another by traveling on items such as clothing, luggage, furniture, boxes and bedding. Bedbugs can crawl about as fast as a ladybug, and can easily travel between floors and rooms in hotels or apartment complexes.

TREATING YOUR HOME

Once your symptoms are treated, you must tackle the underlying infestation. This can be difficult because bedbugs hide so well and can live several months without eating. Your best bet may be to hire a professional exterminator, who may use a combination of pesticides and nonchemical treatments.

Nonchemical treatments may include:

- Vacuuming - A thorough vacuuming of cracks and crevices can physically remove bedbugs from an area. Empty the vacuum after each use.
- Laundering - Washing and drying items in a dryer on a high setting will kill bedbugs in clothing or linens.
- Freezing - Bedbugs are also vulnerable to temperatures below 32 F (0 C), but you'd need to leave the items outdoors or in the freezer for several days.
- Some professional exterminators use portable devices to raise the temperature of a room to a lethal temperature. All stages of bedbugs can be killed at 122 F (50 C). In some cases, you may have to throw out heavily infested items such as mattresses or couches.

WHEN TO SEE A DOCTOR

If you experience allergic reactions or severe skin reactions to bedbug bites, see your doctor for professional treatment.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider)