

Common Questions about Bed Bugs

Bed bugs are found all over the world. These reddish-brown insects are oval, flat, and don't have wings. They prefer to feed off human blood. They hide during the day, coming out mainly at night. They like to hide near a food source so that they can eat in the early morning hours.

When unfed, the adult bed bug is about 5 mm by 3 mm. Once fed, the bed bug gets longer, wider, and its colour changes to a dull red. The change is so great that you may think that you're looking at two different insects.

Each female bed bug can lay about 200 eggs at one time. The eggs take 10 days to hatch. In ideal conditions (23 °C and regular feeding) the female bed bug can lay eggs up to 3 times a year (that's up to 600 eggs a year!). The eggs are sticky, making it easier for them to develop without being disturbed. It takes 2 months for the bed bug to become an adult. They're very hardy insects—they can live more than a year without food! Bed bugs don't spread any infectious human diseases.

Why are we hearing more about them?

Bed bug infestations have increased worldwide over the last few years. Some reasons for the increase in bed bug infestations may be:

- increased world travel
- changes in pesticide use
- not knowing what they look like
- not knowing how to prevent and control infestations
- more resistant to chemical control measures

Where are bed bugs found?

Bed bugs are found wherever there are people. They like dark, cool hiding places that are close to a food source (e.g., where people sleep). Their favourite places are covers and mattresses (especially along the seams). Later, they spread to crevices (gaps) in the bed frame and box spring. When the infestation is really bad, bed bugs will spread to gaps in places like:

- baseboards
- window and door casings
- picture frames
- carpet
- loose wallpaper
- cracked plaster
- the surfaces of stippled ceilings

Bed bugs spread when infested clothing, mattresses, or furniture is moved. They can crawl from one room to another—even from one apartment to another! They can be brought in to your home by infested luggage and clothing. If you've been travelling, check your luggage and clothing carefully before you bring them into your home.

How do I know if there's an infestation?

You'll know if you have an infestation because you'll see bloodstains and dark spots on sheets and mattresses, bed clothes, walls, etc. Sometimes you may even notice a sweet, musty, raspberry-like smell.

How do I control an infestation?

You need to find all the places bed bugs hide. Because they usually come out only at night, they can be hard to find.

A. Non-Chemical Control

Sticky tape or glue paper

You can buy sticky glue paper at most hardware or garden stores. Place the paper around walls, the legs of the bed, or wherever you think they are. You can also use carpet tape, which is sticky on both sides.

Use Heat

It takes a temperature of about 45 °C to kill a bed bug. This means that you can use a steam cleaner in cracks and gaps.

Vacuum

Use a nozzle attachment to vacuum all corners, mattress seams, and gaps in upholstered furniture. Vacuuming will remove both the bed bugs and the eggs. Put any waste and the vacuum cleaner bag in a plastic bag and put it outside.

Stop Them from Climbing

Prevent bed bugs from moving onto furniture by coating the legs of furniture with petroleum jelly (e.g., Vaseline[®]), or by wrapping the legs with double-sided tape.

General Cleaning

Regularly clean your home, wash all bedding and clothing, and vacuum often. Clothing that has been cleaned can be stored in plastic bags that are tied tightly.

B. Chemical Control

Sprays and Aerosols

Before using a pyrethrin spray or aerosol, make sure you vacuum the area well. Remove dust and lint from covers, mattresses, floor corners, and furniture. Put any waste and the vacuum cleaner bag in a plastic bag and put it outside.

You can use the pyrethrin aerosols on cracks and crevices, including mattress seams, bed frames, furniture, electrical boxes, baseboards, carpet edges, and loose wallpaper.

Don't use pyrethrin spray on mattresses or upholstered furniture unless the product label says you can. Sprays are usually used on crevices and cracks in the floor.

To learn more, call your nearest Environmental Health office:

- Calgary: (403) 943-2295
- Edmonton: (780) 735-1800
- Grande Prairie: (780) 513-7517
- Lethbridge: (403) 388-6689
- Red Deer: (403) 356-6366

This content may be updated without notice.

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