

Bed Bug Fact Sheet

For Students in University Housing

Barb Ogg, UNL Extension Educator

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What are bed bugs?

Bed bugs are small, brownish, flattened insects that feed solely on the blood of animals. Adult bed bugs are about 1/4-inch long and reddish brown, with oval, flattened bodies. The young nymphs resemble the adults, but are smaller and somewhat lighter in color. Bed bugs do not fly, but can crawl quickly.

Immediately after feeding, bed bugs are bright red and have an engorged and elongated body and may look like an altogether different insect. Some people confuse bed bugs with mites, ticks, or immature cockroaches.

Why should I be concerned about bed bugs?

Bed bugs do not transmit diseases to humans and are not considered a serious disease threat. Their medical significance is mainly from the inflammation and itching that many people experience. Scratched bites can become infected. Many people experience stress, anxiety and insomnia when dealing with a bed bug infestation.

How can I get bit by a bed bug?

Bed bugs are active at night and usually bite people while they are sleeping. They pierce the skin and withdraw blood. Because the bite is completely painless, most people do not even realize they have been bitten until the welts form.

How do bed bugs find me at night?

Bed bugs have two important senses that help them find humans at night. They seek carbon dioxide, which we exhale. Bed bugs also have thermal sensors at the base of their antenna. This helps them find warm-blooded animals.

Something has bitten me. How can I tell whether it is a bed bug bite or not?

Bed bug bites can be on any part of the body. Experts do not believe bed bugs insert their mouthparts through clothing. Some people have a delayed reaction to bites which may be several days or more than three weeks after getting bitten.

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Bed bugs are reddish brown and have flattened bodies (magnified view).



Immediately after feeding, bed bugs are bright red and have an engorged and elongated body (magnified view with pin head).

Photos by Vicki Jedlicka, UNL Extension



At left — approximate size.



Typical bed bug spots and smears on a mattress.



Bed bug spots under the fabric stapled to the framing of foundation/box springs.



Bed bugs (adult and nymphs) under dust cover of sofa where fabric was stapled to the wood frame.

Know how. Know now.

There is a wide variability in how people respond to bed bug bites. Between 15–20% of the population does not react to bed bug bites — no red mark or itching at all. Of those that do react, the reaction varies from a slight red spot to blisters that itch and burn. This variability sometimes means roommates may not always experience the same reaction, which can be confusing.

Bed bugs often leave tiny dark stains or tarry droplets on sheets, pillowcases, or mattresses.

There are other pests that bite so it is important to examine the area around the bed to confirm the presence of bed bugs. If you get bites on the lower legs or ankles, especially during warmer months, you may be dealing with chigger bites instead of bed bugs.

The bite response is your body's reaction to a foreign substance. During feeding, bed bugs inject anticoagulants and other substances, which is what your body is reacting to. But, skin rashes may have other causes. This is why it is very important to find bed bugs quickly so treatments can begin.

Where do bed bugs come from?

Bed bugs can be transported on luggage, clothing, beds, bedding and furniture. Infestations can sometimes be traced to travel, especially in countries or cities where bed bugs are more common. In recent years, this has become a greater problem for hotels, motels, and apartments, where turnover of occupants is ongoing.

Bed bugs are small, agile and easily crawl into suitcases, boxes and belongings. The tiny, whitish eggs are easily overlooked on most surfaces.

Purchasing used beds, couches and furniture is another way that bed bug infestations get started.

Once established in an apartment, they may spread from room to room throughout a building. It is important to identify the source of the problem quickly so treatments can begin.

Where do bed bugs live and hide?

Bed bugs hide in cracks and crevices, most commonly near the bed or where people sleep at night. Bed bugs often hide within seams, tufts, and crevices of the mattress, box spring, bed frame and headboard. A thorough inspection may require dismantling the bed and standing mattresses/ box springs on edge so that upper and lower surfaces can be examined.

Look for:

- Live bugs of various sizes, ranging from pinhead size to 1/4-inch.
- Light-brown, molted skins of the nymphs,
- Dark spots of bed bug droppings on bedding and hiding places

The most common location to find bed bugs is in the box springs which has many hiding places. Especially check where fabric is stapled to the wooden frame and where pieces of wood are nailed to each other. Bed bugs will also hide in items stored under beds.

Other locations that can harbor bed bugs include upholstered sofas and chairs, especially if they are used for sleeping. Upholstered furniture is difficult to inspect because there are so many hiding places, but carefully examine seams, tufts, skirts, and crevices. Night stands and dressers should be emptied and examined inside and out.

How do I prevent getting bed bugs?

- Do not bring infested items into your room or apartment. Thoroughly inspect any “freebie” or second hand furniture or accessories before you bring them in.
- Check luggage, clothing, and bedding after trips.
- Clean up and reduce clutter to eliminate some of their favorite hiding spots.
- Consider encasing your mattress in a bed bug proof encasement.
- Consider using commercially available bed bug interceptors under the legs of beds.

My roommate is not a very neat person so our place is messy. How does clutter affect bed bugs?

Bed bugs don't infest messy places more frequently than neat ones, but clutter provides more hiding places for them to live. Like other animals, bed bugs need food/water (you) and hiding places. Clutter, especially in sleeping areas, provides bed bugs a lot more hiding places. Clutter may also reduce the effectiveness of treatments. Tidying up is an important factor in eliminating bed bugs more quickly.

What do I do if I find bed bugs?

If you find bugs, seal them in an envelope or small plastic bag and take them to university staff immediately. University staff will carefully inspect your entire room/apartment to determine where bed bugs are hiding and decide what actions are necessary to eliminate bed bugs in your room or apartment. If treatments are needed, you will be given a list of things to do to make treatments more effective.