

## More information

*For more information on bed bugs,  
please contact the  
Northern Kentucky Health Department*

Environmental Health and Safety  
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859.341.4151

*Note: Many of the bed bugs photos used in this brochure are courtesy of  
Michael Potter, University of Kentucky*

# Don't Let the Bed Bugs Bite!

## LIFE WITH BED BUGS



**NORTHERN KENTUCKY**  
INDEPENDENT DISTRICT  
**HEALTH DEPARTMENT**



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INDEPENDENT DISTRICT  
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## WHAT ARE BED BUGS?

Bed bugs are flat insects that are brown or reddish-brown in color. They are very red after a blood meal. Typically, they are ¼ inch in length as an adult with horizontal lines on the body.

Bed bugs are most active at night and shy away from sunlight and artificial lighting.

One female can lay 220 to 500 eggs in her life span, with the eggs hatching six to 17 days after being laid.

The life span of a bed bug can be anywhere from several weeks to more than a year, depending on their environment.

## WHERE ARE THEY FOUND?

Bed bugs can be found in mattresses, box springs, luggage, backpacks, clothing, bedding and furniture, or any crevice or hidden, protected area.



They are found in clean areas as well as dirty areas, although clutter does make it easier for them to hide and harder to get rid of.

Bed bug infestations are more common in places with changing occupants in close proximity, such as apartments, hotels, dorm rooms, shelters and prisons.

## HOW CAN YOU TELL IF A PLACE HAS AN INFESTATION?

Areas will have dark spots and stains from dried excrements from the blood meals. There may be red or rusty spots of blood on the bed sheets, mattresses, or walls.

Heavy infestations may also have a musty smell.

*Bed bugs can survive without feeding for a year, so even vacant units can contain bed bugs.*

## WHAT DO BED BUGS DO TO HUMANS?

Bed bugs feed on humans to obtain the blood they need to survive, called a blood meal.

They generally feed at night, but have been seen to feed during all hours.

## GARBAGE COLLECTORS

Set up a program asking customers disposing of infested articles to make sure that items are covered properly, and have markings/signs on each item that it has bed bugs. Wrapping items in plastic and taping sealed is a good practice. This will help ensure that bed bugs do not infest another location.

Re-use of infested furniture and other articles is a primary source of bed bugs being brought into residences.



## PREVENTION METHODS FOR ALL GROUPS

- Wear gloves, booties and clothing that is light in color to more easily see bed bugs on you when possible.
- If exposure is suspected, wash clothing and related items as soon as possible in hot water and dry on high heat setting to kill any bed bugs present.
- Check dark clothing and items with a flashlight to look for bed bugs.
- Inspect clothing, shoes, purses, baggage, and other belongings that might have been exposed to bed bugs.
- Take as few items as possible into buildings that may be infested while visiting. Do not place belongings in areas most likely to have bed bugs such as beds, couches, and the floor.
- Cover mattresses and box springs with plastic covers.
- Vacuum mattresses, box springs, and carpets; dispose vacuumed contents in sealed plastic bag
- Reduce the amount of clutter in the home



Knowing what to look for while working can promote earlier detection and allow prevention methods to be utilized more efficiently.

## SCHOOLS

School staff should look for the bed bugs themselves and shedding of the different stages on clothing, backpacks, shoes, bedding, mattresses, etc.

Also look for blood excrement on items such as furniture, clothing and backpacks.

Rashes on skin due to bites may be noticed as well.

If bed bugs are found in the school, a letter can be sent to all parents explaining what bed bugs are and how to address them. Prevention methods should be detailed also well.

## FAMILY SERVICES AGENCIES

Family service workers (particularly those providing home visitation services) should educate the family on how to address bed bug issues and advise them to call a professional exterminator.

## CLEANING COMPANIES

House keeping staff (whether in private homes or a public location, such as a hotel or motel) should notify a manager if they see bed bugs.

In private homes, the owners need to be told of the observation and advised to contact an exterminator.

In public facilities, the manager should call an exterminator and have treated as required.

## EMT/EMS

Detection of an infestation may be difficult for emergency service providers busy inside of a home, but they can look for warning signs that a person might have a problem with bed bugs, such as bug bites and rashes on skin.

They bite exposed skin, such as the skin on the face, neck, hands, legs or arms.

Attracted by warmth and the presence of carbon dioxide, bed bugs pierce the skin of its host with two hollow tubes. In one tube it injects its saliva, which contains anticoagulants (blood thinners) and anesthetics, while the other tube withdraws the blood.

After being bitten a small, hard, swollen white welt may develop at the site of the bite. If a person is bitten often or repeatedly, a rash may appear, and itching may last for several days.

However, it's important to note that bed bugs have not been shown to transmit disease.

## HOW ARE THEY SPREAD?

Bed bugs are travelers, hitching rides on luggage, clothing, beds, furniture and anything else that is removable.

Often outbreaks can be traced to travel, as bed bugs move when and where the infested object or person moves.

Bed bugs crawl into spots where they are hard to see, and the eggs are almost impossible to see when



laid on most surfaces.

So, be careful when purchasing or receiving used beds, couches, and other items. ***Do not pick-up items from the curb for re-use!***

## HOW CAN I KEEP FROM GETTING BED BUGS?

- Watch for signs of bed bugs when you travel by examining bed sheets, the mattress/box spring seams and headboard.
- Keep your suitcase off the floor and away from the bed when traveling.
- Do not use secondhand beds, mattresses, box springs, couches or furniture, especially if you are unsure of the item's history.

- Do not bring bedding or furniture that could be infested into your home.
- After traveling, clothing and bedding should be washed in hot soapy water and dried in a dryer on the hot cycle.
- Suitcases and backpacks should also be inspected thoroughly. Scrub cracks and crevices with a stiff brush and then vacuum thoroughly.
- If you suspect that you have bed bugs, bring a professional exterminator in to evaluate and treat the home as needed. Make sure that the professional exterminator is qualified to treat bed bugs.



extermination of nearby units will also be required.

In heavy infestations, furniture may have to be discarded.

If an item is marked that it is infected with bed bugs, wrap it up so that the bugs are trapped and can not spread/travel to another location.

## WHY HAVE BED BUGS RE-EMERGED AS A PROBLEM IN THE UNITED STATES?

The liberal use of the pesticide DDT caused bed bugs to all but vanish from the United States; however, the insecticide was found to have negative environmental effects, and its use has been banned.

Without the use of DDT and similar banned products, bed bugs have started to re-emerge in many areas around the United States.

Now bed bugs are also becoming resistant to some commonly used pesticides.

Bed bug populations have also increased due to an increase of international travel to and from areas of the world where bed bugs are more prevalent.

## TRAVEL TIPS

- Look around the room to seek potential hiding places for bedbugs, such as carpet edges, mattress seams, pillow case linings, wall trim or other tiny crack-like places where bed bugs might hide.
- Look for signs of bed bug activity: droppings, eggs, bloodstains or even bed bugs themselves.
- Keep a flashlight nearby when sleeping to immediately observe activity during the night.
- Never leave your clothing

lying on the bed, or any location of possible infestation. Use hangers or hooks capable of keeping all clothing distant from the floor or bed.

- Close your suitcase or travel bag when you're not using it.
- Elevate your luggage off the floor to table or chairs.
- Keep any bed bugs you find to show the hotel owner/manager, if possible.
- Trust your instincts.

## Tips for Specific Groups

Certain groups can help watch for bed bugs in the community including schools, family services agencies (particularly those doing home visits) cleaning/maid services, emergency medical services and garbage collectors.

