

**New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services  
Consumer and Environmental Health Services  
Public Health, Sanitation and Safety Program**

## **Bed Bug Fact Sheet**

### **What are bed bugs?**

Bed bugs are small insects that feed on the blood of mammals and birds. Adult bed bugs are oval, wingless and rusty red colored, and have flat bodies, antennae and small eyes. They are visible to the naked eye, but often hide in cracks and crevices. When bed bugs feed, their bodies swell and become a brighter red. In homes, bed bugs feed primarily on the blood of humans, usually at night when people are sleeping.



### **What does a bed bug bite feel and look like?**

Typically, the bite is painless and rarely awakens a sleeping person. However, it can produce large, itchy welts on the skin. Welts from bed bug bites do not have a red spot in the center – those welts are more characteristic of flea bites.



### **Are bed bugs dangerous?**

Although bed bugs may be a nuisance to people, they are not known to spread disease. They are known to cause allergic reactions from their saliva in sensitive people.

### **How long do bed bugs live?**

The typical life span of a bed bug is about 10 months. They can survive for weeks to months without feeding.

### **How does a home become infested with bed bugs?**

In most cases, bed bugs are transported from infested areas to non-infested areas when they cling onto someone's clothing, or crawl into luggage, furniture or bedding that is then brought into homes.

## How do I know if my home is infested with bed bugs?

If you have bed bugs, you may also notice itchy welts on you or your family member's skin. You may also see the bed bugs themselves, crushed bed bugs, or bug droppings in your home. Bed bugs often hide in or near beds and in the tufts, mattresses and more severe



may spread to cracks in bed frames and box springs; behind headboards; inside nightstands; behind baseboards, window and door casings, pictures, and moldings; and in nearby furniture, loosened wallpaper, and cracks in plaster and flooring. Bed bugs may also hide in piles of books, papers, boxes, and other clutter near sleeping areas.

may also see the bed small bloodstains from dark spots from bed home. Bed bugs often and bedroom furniture, seams, and folds of daybed covers. In infestations, bed bugs and crevices in bed

## How can I get rid of bed bugs?

The NJ Department of Health and Senior Services (NJDHSS) recommends that homeowners hire a pest control professional licensed by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) to evaluate what type of pest is present, and to exterminate them if required.



If bed bugs are suspected then a licensed pest controller should be consulted. A careful inspection must be undertaken and all possible hiding places within infested and adjoining rooms examined. Once all likely sources have been identified, then an approved insecticide, which has some residual activity, should be applied to all harbourages. The synthetic pyrethroids are often the main chemicals used for control in Australia; however these are not very effective and can even repel the bugs. The carbamates and the organophosphates are far more effective for control, but may not be recommended for use on mattresses (check the label).

Non-chemical approaches to control involve the use of hot air and/or wrapping up infested materials in black plastic and placing the articles in the sun, thereby killing the bed bugs with the heat generated. However this should only be used for small items, if at all. Clothes can be washed in hot water and dried on the hot cycle of the clothes dryer. Delicate materials can be placed into the freezer. Generally, pesticides will need to be applied in conjunction with any non-chemical means of control. Good housekeeping practices and a reduction in possible harbourages such as cracks and crevices will discourage repeat infestations. As bed bugs are cryptic in their habits, complete control is often difficult to achieve with the first treatment. This is especially so with heavy infestations and thus a post control treatment evaluation is always advisable. Licensed applicators should always provide proof of their licensure and their company's licensure upon request.

## If I have a bed bug infestation, what can I do myself?

If you have a bed bug infestation or if you or your family has been bitten by bed bugs, the NJDHSS recommends that you consult with a licensed, professional pest control company. Some of the things you can do yourself, include:

- When it is colder than 25 degrees F, place mattresses and furniture outside for several hours to kill bed bugs. Temperatures below 25 degrees F will freeze and kill bed bugs.
- Wash all bedding, draperies and clothing in hot water on a regular basis.
- Vacuum and steam-clean carpets.
- Use insecticides to get rid of bed bugs that are hiding in walls and other large objects. (Choose insecticides with "pyrethrins" as an active ingredient on the label. Only use insecticides labeled for household use because some insecticides can damage or stain your furniture, wallpaper, etc. Use care when applying insecticides, especially around children, the elderly, immuno-compromised people, and anyone else who may be sensitive to insecticides. Always follow label directions carefully.)

Bed bugs can be difficult to get rid of because they hide so well. If two weeks have passed since you first tried to rid your home of bed bugs and you still notice signs of bed bugs, repeat the above steps. For heavy infestations contact a pest control service.

## Find out where bed bugs are hiding in your home

Use a bright flashlight to examine bedroom furniture for bed bugs or their dark droppings.

You should check:

- behind the headboard and tufts of and around or
- in the seams the mattress, inside the box spring
- along the bedroom crevices of baseboards, baseboard
- especially the area below the headboard
- inside and around
- nightstands
- behind or within other items or cracks in the bedroom (for example, window and door casings, pictures, and moldings, nearby furniture, loosened wallpaper, and cracks in plaster and partitions, and clutter)



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In addition to using a flashlight, carefully aiming a hot hair dryer into these crevices while looking will help force bed bugs out.

## Clean areas where bed bugs hide

- Thoroughly clean all bedding, linens, curtains, rugs, carpets, and clothes. Washing items in hot water and drying them on the highest dryer setting will kill bed bugs. For those items that may be harmed by washing and drying at high temperatures, soak in warm water with lots of laundry soap for several hours before rinsing.
- Wipe away or vacuum all dust from the bed frame, nearby furniture, floors and carpets. Vacuum mattresses carefully. After vacuuming, immediately place the vacuum cleaner bag in a plastic bag, seal it tightly, and throw the bag away in an outdoor container.
- If you find bed bugs on the mattress, buy a waterproof zippered mattress cover. These covers often say “allergen rated,” or “for dust mites.” Scrub the mattress seams with a stiff brush to dislodge bed bugs and any eggs. Then enclose the mattress in the cover for at least one year. This will trap any remaining bed bugs inside the cover, killing them.
- Throw away and replace an infested box spring if necessary.
- Remove all clutter from bedrooms and any other furniture that people may sleep or nap upon. Place this clutter into a plastic garbage bag, seal it tightly, and throw it away. If you need to save it, make sure it stays sealed up for a year.
- Repair any cracks in plaster and all loosened wallpaper, especially in bedrooms.

## Be very cautious about using pesticides

The NJDHSS recommends that homeowners hire a pest control professional licensed by the NJDEP to evaluate what type of pest is present, and to exterminate them.

Pesticide products labeled for bed bugs may be available at drug, hardware or home improvement stores that adults can apply themselves. If you choose to use a pesticide, or if a licensed exterminator suggests you use one, follow these precautions:

- Only use pesticides clearly labeled as intended for bed bug extermination. Never use a cockroach spray, ant spray, or any other pesticide that does not list bed bugs on the label for bed bug extermination.
- Make sure you read, understand and follow the instructions on the pesticide's label.
- Never spray pesticides on mattresses or sofas, or in areas where children are present.
- Never purchase or use a product without a manufacturer's label and never buy pesticides from street vendors.

## Can I prevent bed bugs from entering my home?

Some infestations can be prevented by washing clothing and bedding immediately after returning from a trip. Inspect all used beds, sofas, or upholstered chairs and bedding for signs of bed bugs before bringing them into your home. **Never bring discarded** bed frames, mattresses, box springs, or upholstered furniture into your home.