



## **BED BUGS: WHAT ARE THEY AND HOW DO I PREVENT THEM?**

Bed bugs are reddish-brown insects with a flat, oval body that measures approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  of an inch (6.35 mm) long. Bed bugs usually hide close to the bed but can spread to other areas of the room or home over time.

Bedbugs are generally active only at night, with a peak attack period about an hour before dawn, though given the opportunity, they may attempt to feed at other times of the day. Attracted by warmth and the presence of carbon dioxide, the bug pierces the skin of its host with two hollow tubes. With one tube it injects its saliva, which contains anticoagulants and anesthetics, while with the other it withdraws the blood of its host. After feeding for about five minutes, the bug returns to its hiding place. The bites cannot usually be felt until some minutes or hours later, as a dermatological reaction to the injected agents. *Although bedbugs can live for up to 18 months without feeding, they typically seek blood every five to ten days.*

Bed bugs enter a home or facility through many possible ways, the most common being hitching a ride on your luggage, computer, clothing, or other belongings after you have stayed somewhere else, or traveled where bed bugs are present, including on public transportation. Moving time is another possible way to get into a new home, as they catch a ride in the moving boxes.

Treating bed bugs is complex. Your likelihood of success depends on many factors, including:

- How many bed bugs you have;
- How much clutter is available for hiding places;
- Whether your neighbors have bedbugs; and
- Whether all residents of a house or building will participate.

Getting rid of bed bugs completely can take weeks to months, depending on the nature and extent of the infestation. To be successful, everyone will need to cooperate and do their part.

The Environmental Protection Agency recommends the following steps will help you begin:

1. Identify the problem
2. Develop a strategy
3. Keep the infestation from expanding
  - a. Remove infested items. Place them in a sealed plastic bag and treat them. Learn more about treatment methods in the sections below.

- b. Items that cannot be treated should be placed in a sealed plastic bag and left there for up to a year to ensure any active bugs are dead.
  - c. Empty the vacuum after each use. Seal the bag as tightly as possible and immediately throw it out in an outdoor trash container.
  - d. Discard furniture responsibly if you can't safely eliminate the bed bugs. Destroy it so someone else won't be tempted to bring it into their home. For example:
    - i. Rip covers and remove stuffing from furniture items.
    - ii. Use spray paint to mark furniture with "Bed Bugs."
  - e. Have infested items picked up as soon as possible by the trash collection agency.
  - f. Don't discard furniture if you can safely eliminate the bed bugs from it.
4. Prepare for treatment
  5. Kill the bed bugs using safe and approved methods
  6. Evaluate and prevent - Continue to inspect for bed bugs, at least every 7 days, in case any eggs remain. You can use interceptors, traps or other monitoring methods. Interceptors are placed under the legs of furniture to catch bed bugs and keep them from climbing the legs. Commercial and do-it-yourself interceptors are options.

You may have to follow these steps more than once to kill all the bugs and their eggs.