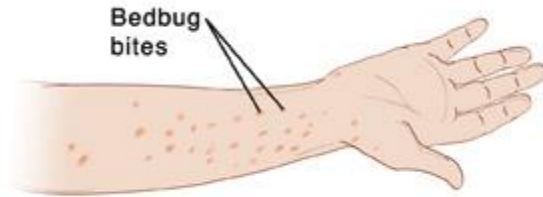


Bedbugs



After years of being very rare in the US, bedbugs are making a comeback. These bugs are small, about the size of an apple seed. They are reddish-brown, oval, and look slightly flattened. Bedbugs feed on human and animal blood, usually at night during sleep. Bedbugs are a nuisance. But they are not a major threat to your health.

Facts about bedbugs

- Bedbugs are active mainly at night. During the day, they hide in dark places, often in and around where people or animals sleep. They are commonly found on mattresses and boxsprings and behind headboards. But they can hide anywhere.
- Bedbugs are small and hard to see. They are often carried from place to place in items like luggage, furniture, and clothing. This is why they spread so easily.
- Bedbugs are not attracted to dirt. Even the cleanest house or hotel can have bedbugs.
- Unlike mosquitoes, bedbugs do not transmit disease. If you are bitten, you do not have to worry about catching a blood-borne illness.
- Insect repellents have little effect on bedbugs.
- Adult bedbugs can live for several months without a blood feeding.
- Bedbugs are very hard to get rid of. If an infestation is suspected, it is recommended that a professional exterminator be called.

Signs of bedbugs

Bites can be the first sign of a bedbug infestation. When inspecting for the bugs, look in crevices of mattresses and box springs, behind the headboard, and in and on objects near or under the bed. You may see the bugs themselves. Or, you may see tiny dark stains on fabric or carpets. Smears of blood on sheets and nightclothes upon awakening are another sign. In some cases, the bugs are so well hidden they can't be found unless items are taken apart.

Bedbug bites

Bedbugs look for food at night. They bite while people or animals are sleeping. The bites are most often painless. Many people never know they've been bitten. However, some people develop an itchy red welt or swelling. And if a person has an allergic reaction, severe itching, blisters, or hives can develop. Bites are often on areas that are exposed, such as the head, neck, arms, and hands. Bedbug bites are not dangerous and don't spread illness. But if the bite is scratched and the skin is broken and irritated, there is a chance that a skin infection can develop.

Treating bites

Bite symptoms usually go away on their own within a week or two. During this time, over-the-counter (OTC) hydrocortisone ointment or cream can help relieve itching and swelling. If itching is bad, an OTC oral antihistamine (such as Benadryl) can help. If an infection develops from scratching the bites, the health care provider can prescribe an antibiotic.

If you were bitten by bedbugs in your home, talk to a licensed pest-control professional or company. They can inspect your home and help you get rid of the bugs safely.

When to call your health care provider

If you have bites, call your health care provider if you develop any of the following:

- A fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher
- Signs of infection of the bites, such as increased swelling and pain, warmth, or oozing
- Signs of allergic reaction, such as hives, spreading rash, throat itching or swelling, or wheezing

Avoiding bedbugs

- Avoid buying used beds, but if you do buy used bed frames, mattresses, box springs, or other furniture, be sure to check them carefully for bedbugs before bringing them into your home.
- If bed bugs are found or suspected in the bed, using bedbug excluding mattress and box spring encasement covers can seal them in where they will eventually die.
- When traveling, remove linens from the top of the bed and inspect the mattress and headboard for signs of the bugs. Place luggage on a hard surface such as a table or on a luggage rack and not on the floor.
- If you suspect you were exposed to bedbugs while traveling, wash all clothing in hot water directly upon your return. Washing alone will not kill the bugs; it must be in high temperatures, at least 113° F (45° C) for one hour.
- Never pick up items discarded on the street—such as bed frames, mattresses, box springs, or upholstered furniture—for use in your home. These items may carry bedbugs.

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