

What You Need to Know about Bed Bugs

What are bed bugs?

Bed bugs are small parasitic insects that feed on the blood of mammals and birds. Adult bed bugs have flat bodies about one-quarter of an inch in length; they are copper colored and wingless. Young bed bugs are nearly colorless and very small (1/16 inch). Bed bugs do not fly; they either crawl or are carried from place to place. When a bed bug feeds, its body swells and becomes bright red, making it appear to be a different insect. In homes, hotels, or other dwellings, bed bugs feed primarily on human blood, usually at night when people are sleeping.

Are bed bugs dangerous?

Bed bugs are not known to transmit disease. However, bed bug bites can cause large, itchy welts on the skin. A person's reaction to insect bites is an immune response and therefore varies from person to person. Bed bug bites are usually painless and rarely awaken a sleeping person. If people are sleeping side by side, one person may have a severe reaction while the other shows no evidence of being bitten. Sometimes the red welts caused by the bites will not be apparent until many days after a person was bitten.

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

If there are bed bugs in your house, you may notice itchy welts on your or your family's skin. You may also see the bed bugs or evidence of their presence, such as small bloodstains from crushed bed bugs or dark spots from bed bug droppings. Bed bugs are found most often around areas where a person sleeps or rests. These areas include: on or near beds and bedroom furniture; in the tufts, seams, and folds of mattresses and daybed covers; and in clutter around sleeping areas. In more severe infestations, bed bugs may spread to cracks and crevices in bed frames and box springs and be found behind headboards, inside nightstands, and behind baseboards, pictures, and moldings. It is important to inspect furniture adjacent to sleeping areas for the presence of bed bugs, as well as behind loosened wallpaper. Bed bugs may also hide in piles of books, papers, boxes, and around pet sleeping areas.

How long do bed bugs live?

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

Will bed bugs feed on my pets?

Bed bugs will feed on pets, but prefer to feed on humans. Pet sleeping areas should be inspected and treated by a licensed pest control company.

How can you get rid of bed bugs?

The California Department of Public Health, Vector-Borne Disease Section, recommends that property owners hire a pest control professional licensed by the California Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA), Structural Pest Control Board to evaluate what type of pest is present and to exterminate them if necessary.

