

Bed Bugs

What are bed bugs?

Bed bugs (scientific name: *Cimex lectularius*) are small insects that bite and feed on the blood of humans and animals, usually at night while they are sleeping. Bed bugs are often found in (infesting) homes, hotels, dorm rooms, or other places where people live, stay, or visit.

Full-grown, adult bed bugs have flat bodies about 1/4 inch long ([about the size of an apple seed](#)) and are reddish-brown in color. Young bed bugs are very small (1/16 inch long) and are almost colorless or white. When a bed bug feeds on blood, its body swells and becomes bright red. Bed bugs do not fly – they either crawl or are carried from place to place in clothing, luggage, furniture, bedding, or other items. Bed bugs can live ten months to one year and can go weeks to months without feeding.

Where are bed bugs found?

Bed bugs are found throughout the world in homes, apartments, homeless shelters, hotels, motels, cruise ships, buses, trains, and dorm rooms – almost any place where people stay. More specifically, bed bugs are usually found in or around areas where people sleep or rest (usually within 8 feet of these areas). These areas include:

- on or near beds and bedroom furniture
- in the tufts, seams, and folds of mattresses
- in clutter around sleeping areas

Bed bugs may also live in the cracks in bed frames and box springs, and can also be found behind headboards, inside nightstands, and behind baseboards, pictures, wallpaper, and molding. Bed bugs may also hide in piles of books, papers, boxes, and around pet sleeping areas.

What are the signs of bed bugs in my home or in a place I'm staying?

If an area is infested with bed bugs, you may see:

- bed bugs hiding in the folds of mattresses and sheets
- bed bug skin left behind after they shed or molt
- tiny, rust-colored spots or stains from bed bug droppings that look like marker spots/dots on the mattress or nearby furniture

If there are bed bugs in your home or in a place you are staying, you may also notice itchy welts, or bite marks, on your face, neck, arms, hands, or other body parts. If a person is bitten by a bed bug, it may take up to 14 days for bite marks to show on the skin.

The best way to prevent bed bugs is to regularly check your mattress and sleeping/resting areas for signs of bed bugs.

Do bed bugs spread disease?

No, bed bugs don't spread disease, but bed bug bites can cause large, itchy welts on the skin that look similar to mosquito bites. Most people won't know they have been bitten by a bed bug while they are sleeping. Bed bug bites are usually painless and rarely wake a person up while they are sleeping. Bite marks on the skin may be random or appear in a straight line. Scratching of the bites may lead to a skin infection. If this happens, seek medical care.

Will bed bugs bite and feed on my pets?

Yes, bed bugs will feed on pets, but they prefer to bite and feed on humans.

How does an area become infested with bed bugs?

In most cases, bed bugs are accidentally moved from an area that is infested with bed bugs to an area where there are no bed bugs. Bed bugs can easily be hiding in and carried on clothing, luggage, furniture, or bedding that is brought into homes, hotels, or other places where people stay. Because of their slim bodies, bed bugs can hide in the smallest of spaces and stay hidden for a long time.

How can I prevent bed bugs from entering my home?

You can help prevent bed bugs from entering your home by carefully checking all used mattresses, box springs, sofas, upholstered chairs, other furniture, luggage, and bedding for signs of bed bugs before bringing them into your home. You can also help prevent carrying bed bugs into your home by washing clothing and bedding in hot water and drying it on the hottest setting possible immediately after returning from a trip or staying in a hotel or other overnight location.

What should I do if I find bed bugs?

If you think you have found bed bugs in your home or on your property, you should **call a licensed pest control operator (PCO)** to inspect your property and treat the area to get rid of the bed bugs.

If you are renting a space, such as an apartment or rental home, a written notice must be given to the property owner and should contain the following information:

- 1) description of what was found
- 2) date/time bed bugs were found
- 3) location of infestation
- 4) name, unit, and contact information of the tenant or person renting

The property owner must contact a PCO to inspect the property within 48 hours, and a written notice of findings must be provided to the tenant within two business days of the inspection.

If you think you have found bed bugs in a hotel, nursing home, hospital, prison, or on public transportation, you should report it to property staff and the local county health or environmental health department. Bed bugs are considered a public health nuisance

and should be reported to local health authorities so they can address the problem.

If you are visiting or staying in a place that may have bed bugs (such as a motel or hospital), wash any clothing and bedding that you carry with you in hot water and dry them on the hottest setting as soon as you get home. This will kill bed bugs on those items and help prevent them from spreading and infesting your home.

How can I get rid of bed bugs?

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

Licensed applicators should provide proof of their licensure and their company's licensure upon request. Visit the [Structural Pest Control Board license search webpage](https://www.pestboard.ca.gov/license.shtml) (<https://www.pestboard.ca.gov/license.shtml>), or call DCA Structural Pest Control Board at (916) 561-8704 to confirm that the company is certified.

Time and money can be wasted trying to get rid of an infestation if an insect is not properly identified. Controlling and removing bed bugs involves procedures that are often different from the removal of other pests and will require multiple visits from a PCO. A knowledgeable PCO will perform a complete inspection of an area. When bed bug hiding places are found, the PCO will provide chemical and/or non-chemical methods to control the infested areas. A PCO may use pesticides and specialized equipment, such as steam cleaners, to kill the bed bugs. After two or three weeks, be sure that the PCO returns for follow-up treatment. Usually, at least two treatments are needed to get rid of bed bugs.

It is important to follow and fully cooperate with all of the pest control company's recommendations. These recommendations may include washing clothing and bedding and reducing clutter in infested rooms. All materials removed from a bed bug infested room should be placed in tightly sealed plastic garbage bags before being thrown away or properly washed. This will prevent bed bugs from being moved to other areas.

Where can I get more information about bed bugs?

- [CDPH Bed Bugs webpage](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Bedbugs.aspx)
<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Bedbugs.aspx>
- [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Bed Bugs webpage](https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/bedbugs/)
<https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/bedbugs/>
- [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Bed Bugs webpage](https://www.epa.gov/bedbugs)
<https://www.epa.gov/bedbugs>
- [National Pest Management Association Bed Bug FAQ webpage](http://www.pestworld.org/pest-control-help/pest-control-faqs/bed-bugs/)
<http://www.pestworld.org/pest-control-help/pest-control-faqs/bed-bugs/>