

Bed Bugs

FACT SHEET



Washtenaw County
Health Department

What are bed bugs?

Bed bugs, or *Cimex lectularius*, are small, wingless insects. They feed on the blood of animals such as birds, bats and humans. They hide in cracks and crevices in beds, furniture, floors and walls during the day, and come out at night to feed. Bed bugs are not caused by poor hygiene or bad housekeeping. They are not known to spread disease.

Adult bed bugs are about the size of an apple seed. They are gray or brown in color, but turn red after finishing a blood meal. Bed bugs can survive a very long time without a meal – possibly a year. Female bed bugs will lay 200-500 eggs in a lifetime. Bed bug eggs are cream colored and look like small pieces of rice.

What are signs and symptoms of bed bugs?

Most people don't feel the bug biting. Bed bug bites often cause small itchy red bumps on the skin. Bite marks can take on a variety of appearances depending on the person. Bed bug bites may be confused with other insect bites, such as spiders or mosquitoes. Some people may have more serious or allergic reactions to the bites, such as large, itchy bumps, blister-like sores or rashes similar to hives. In very rare instances, a severe allergic reaction can lead to anaphylactic shock.

Treatment of bed bug bites is mostly for the relief of symptoms. Bites usually heal within one to two weeks. An over-the-counter topical cortisone cream can be used to relieve itching. It is important to avoid scratching to prevent infection. Consult your health care provider if you have concerns. An oral antibiotic may be recommended if infection occurs, and oral corticosteroids may be prescribed for severe allergic reactions.



5 life cycle stages of unfed (top row) and fed (bottom row) bed bugs

Signs of a bed bug infestation in your home:

- Small bloodstains on your sheets and mattresses.
- Bed bugs or their eggs may be found in the folds and creases in the bed linens and seams or tufts of mattresses and box springs. They may also be found within pleats of curtains, beneath loose areas of wallpaper near the bed, in corners of desks and dressers, in crevices of sofas and chairs, on furniture, behind cove molding, and in laundry or other items on the floor or around the room.
- Sometimes, dark brown or reddish fecal spots of bed bugs can be found on the bedding, mattress or walls near the bed.
- Large bed bug infestations can smell like coriander or crushed cilantro.

How are bed bugs prevented?

- Inspect antiques and secondhand furniture thoroughly before bringing them into your home.
- Place new or second-hand clothing in a dryer set on the highest heat the fabric can stand for at least 30 minutes.
- While you are traveling, inspect any room where you will be staying, paying close attention to the sheets and mattress.
- After you return from a trip, check your luggage for insects.
- Change bed linens at least once a week, and wash in the hottest water the fabric can stand.
- Vacuum around the home at least once a week, paying special attention to areas around the bed.
- Caulk holes in floors and walls.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information contact your health care provider or call Washtenaw County Environmental Health at 734-222-3800.

How do I get rid of bed bugs in my home?

Getting rid of bed bugs is difficult. They are very good at hiding, and they can spread quickly between rooms and buildings. The most effective way to control bed bugs is through a combination of chemical measures and heat treatments applied by a Pest Management Professional (PMP).

Companies must be licensed by the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. Ask friends or neighbors for recommendations. Get quotes from companies and ask for references.

Unfortunately, the service of a PMP can be costly. Controlling bed bugs on your own is difficult and time consuming. However, it can be done by a combination of laundering or freezing items, and conducting a very thorough cleaning of your home.

When using chemicals to control bed bugs:

Pesticides can be harmful to people and pets. We recommend you hire a Pest Management Professional to apply pesticides. Do **not** apply any pesticide to mattresses or to surfaces that will be in direct human contact, except when the pesticide label specifically states the product can be used in that manner. **Read** and **understand** the label. Apply the product only if you understand and follow the instructions.

What if I have a complaint regarding a hotel, apartment or other facility regarding bed bugs?

- Contact the manager of the facility first and explain your situation. Most facilities have existing contracts with pest control companies. If you live in an apartment, work with the apartment manager and the pest control company on any recommendations they have to help treat the area for bed bugs. You may be asked to remove clutter from a room, launder sheets, elevate furniture, etc.
- If you feel you are not getting an adequate response to your concerns, contact Washtenaw County Environmental Health at 734-222-3800. Please note that we will not come out and inspect for bugs. However, we will work with you and the management to make sure that proper steps are being taken to remedy the situation.

Tips for treating bed bug infestations:

- Wash items such as sheets and clothing in the hottest water the fabric can stand or place in a dryer set on high heat for a minimum of 30 minutes.
- Freezing can kill bed bugs. Leave items in the freezer for at least 4 days, at a temperature that is at or lower than 0°F.
- Reduce clutter to limit hiding places for bed bugs.
- If you are throwing things out, put small items in a tightly sealed trash bag and place in a garbage bin outside your home. For larger items like furniture, wrap the item in plastic if possible and clearly mark that the item may have bedbugs to discourage others from bringing the item into their home.
- Thoroughly clean the infested rooms as well as other rooms in the residence. Scrub infested surfaces with a stiff brush to dislodge eggs and use a powerful vacuum to remove bed bugs from cracks and crevices. Thoroughly vacuum carpeting and large rugs. Vacuum mattresses, especially paying attention to tucks and seams where bed bugs like to hide. Also vacuum around baseboards, electronics, couches and any other potential hiding places. Immediately after vacuuming, place the bag or vacuumed contents into a plastic garbage bag, tightly seal, and discard in a garbage bin outside your home.
- Use a damp cloth or mop to clean tile or wood floors.
- Inspect and clean small spots where bed bugs can hide. Remove drawers from desks and dressers and turn furniture over, if possible. Take apart bed frames to expose additional bug hiding places.
- You usually don't have to throw away your mattress. Instead, put a special mattress cover on your mattress and box springs. Once they are installed, inspect the bags. If you find any holes or tears, seal them completely with tape. Any bugs trapped within the sealed mattress covers will eventually die. Bed bugs can live a long time without a meal, so leave the cover on the mattress for at least 18 months.
- Prevent bed bugs from crawling onto the bed. Pull the bed frame away from the wall and tuck sheets and blankets so they will not contact the floor.
- Dry heat treatment is one of the most effective methods of treating bed bugs. However, this treatment should only be done by a Pest Management Professional. Do not attempt a heat treatment by yourself.

Michigan Department of Health & Human Services: www.michigan.gov/bedbugs

Resources:

University of Minnesota: <http://www.bedbugs.umn.edu>