RESIDENT RESOURCE GUIDE: what you need to know about bed bugs
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While bed bug infestations have become increasingly common in the Chicagoland area, there are steps you can take to prevent bed bugs from infesting your home.

This guide will help you:

• Learn more about bed bugs and how they thrive.
• Prevent bed bugs from infesting your home.
• Safely rid your home of bed bugs if they do occur.
• Select and work with a pest control professional.
What is a bed bug?

Bed bugs are small, oval, wingless insects the size of a pencil eraser that are flat and reddish-brown. They hide during the day and come out during the night to look for blood. They belong to the insect family Cimicidae, which bites people. They are often mistaken for ticks or small cockroaches.

What does a bed bug bite feel and look like?

Typically, the bite is painless and rarely awakens a sleeping person. However, it can produce large, itchy welts on the skin. Welts from bed bug bites do not have a red spot in the center – those welts are more characteristic of flea bites.

Are bed bugs dangerous?

Although bed bugs may be a nuisance to people, they are not known to spread disease. They are known to cause allergic reactions from their saliva in some people.

Can bed bugs bite my pets?

Yes. Dogs, cats, and other animals can serve as hosts for bedbugs.

How long do bed bugs live?

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

How does a home become infested with bed bugs?

In most cases, bed bugs are transported from infested areas to non-infested areas when they cling onto someone’s clothing, or crawl into luggage, furniture or bedding that is then brought into homes.

Where are bed bugs found?

Bed bugs can be found in places that are frequented or occupied by humans. Bed bugs are most commonly found in dwellings with a high rate of occupant turnover, such as hotels, hostels, dormitories, and apartment complexes. Bed bugs also can infest private dwellings, airplanes, movie theaters, ships, trains, and buses.
What can landlords and building managers do?

• Provide tenants with information about bed bugs. Share this guide.

• Encourage everyone to report bed bugs as soon as they know of a problem.

• Notify tenants and inspect all units adjacent to, above and below apartments found to have bed bugs.

• Hire a pest management professional to treat for bed bugs. Be wary of companies that make unrealistic claims that bed bugs can be controlled with one visit.

• Help tenants if they cannot move furniture themselves or need help to get rid of clutter.

• Give advance notice of any planned use of pesticides.

• Inspect upon vacancy and if necessary treat units to ensure they have no bed bugs or other pests before renting.
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RECOGNIZING A BED BUG

From its appearance

Bed bugs are small insects that feed mainly on human blood. A newly hatched bed bug is semi-transparent, light tan in color, and the size of a poppy seed. Adult bed bugs are flat, have rusty-red-colored oval bodies, and are about the size of an apple seed.

Bed bugs can be easily confused with other small household insects, including carpet beetles, spider beetles and newly hatched cockroaches (nymphs).

From its markings, droppings and eggs

Blood stains, droppings and eggs can be found in several locations including:

• Mattress seams and tufts, sheets, pillow cases and upholstered furniture.

• Crevices and cracks in furniture.

• Baseboards of walls.

From its bite

Some people have no reaction to a bed bug bite. However, for those that do, bite marks may appear within minutes or days, usually where skin is exposed during sleep. They can be small bumps or large itchy welts. The welts usually disappear after a few days. Because the bites may resemble mosquito and other insect bites, a bump or welt alone does not mean there are bed bugs.
THE HEALTH EFFECTS OF BED BUGS

Although bed bugs and their bites are a nuisance, they are not known to spread disease.

• Bed bug bites can be very itchy and irritating, but will heal in a few days. In unusual cases, the welt may persist for several weeks. Usually an anti-itching ointment will help, but if bites become infected, see a doctor.

• The anxiety about being bitten can also lead to sleeplessness, which can affect one’s well-being. Responding to bed bugs, properly and effectively, helps keep anxiety in check.

Some people may become so desperate that they will use illegal or excessive amounts of pesticides, which can lead to poisonings.

This guide provides advice on how to get rid of bed bugs safely.
PREVENTING BED BUGS FROM ENTERING YOUR HOME

Bed bugs can enter homes by latching onto used furniture, luggage, clothing, and by traveling along connecting pipes and wiring.

- Never bring bed frames, mattresses, box springs or upholstered furniture found on the street into your home.

- Check all used or rented furniture for bed bugs.

- When traveling, inspect the bed and furniture. Keep suitcases off the floor and bed and inspect them before you leave.

- If you suspect you have been around bed bugs, immediately wash and dry your clothing on hot settings or store it in a sealed plastic bag until you can wash it.

- Seal cracks and crevices in walls, pipes, windows and furniture even if you don’t have bed bugs. This will help prevent bed bugs and other pests from coming in.
INSPECTING FOR BED BUGS

Look for bed bugs, blood stains, droppings and eggs (a flashlight and a magnifying glass will help). Start by looking in an area 10-20 feet around where you sleep or sit. That’s the distance a bed bug will usually travel. Keep a written record of every room and location where you find signs of bed bugs. Share this record with a pest control professional.
Check mattresses, box springs, bed frames and bedding

- Check the top and bottom seams, tufts and any rips in the covers of mattresses and box springs.

- Look underneath the bed and along the bed frame and headboards.

Check cracks and crevices in bedroom furniture, floor boards and baseboards, windows and door frames

- Use a flashlight to inspect cracks and crevices of furniture, windows and door frames.

- Swipe a putty knife or playing card, into cracks and crevices to force bed bugs out. A hot blow dryer on a low setting will also work. If live bugs do come out, crush them with a paper towel and throw them away outside your building.

- Remove drawers from furniture and check the inside, top and bottom, joints and even screw holes.

- Remove and check zippers, seams and tufts in cushions of upholstered furniture and furniture frames.

Check walls and wall hangings

- Using crevice tools, check paintings, posters, pictures and mirrors.

- Check cracks in plaster and peeling wallpaper.

- Inspect the face plates of electrical outlets and light switches (by eye only - do not insert anything into areas with wires). Look in phones, clocks, smoke detectors and toys.
GETTING RID OF BED BUGS

If you have bed bugs, don’t feel ashamed. It can happen to anyone. If you live in an apartment, notify your landlord and neighbors immediately. The sooner everyone responds, the more successful the efforts will be.

Choosing and working with a pest control company

• Bed bug infestations usually require the services of well-trained, licensed pest management professionals, also called exterminators.

• Tenants should review their lease to see if the landlord is required to provide pest control. If not, tenants will have to hire their own professional.

• There are many pest control companies and pest professionals in the DuPage County area. However, not all are licensed or trained in managing bed bugs.

• To get rid of bed bugs you must choose the right company, and be clear about what you want done. Be sure to also monitor their performance.

PREVENTION and control

choose a GOOD professional

• Find a company through dependable referrals, directories, professional associations and check to make sure they are licensed with the state at (www.idph.state.il.us) or call (217) 782-4977.

• Interview several companies before choosing one. Ask about their training, and their approach to controlling bed bugs.

• Agree on a service plan and its cost. Expect at least two treatment visits and a third follow-up visit to confirm that bed bugs have been eliminated. Severe infestations or cluttered apartments may take more visits to eliminate bed bugs.
A good company will...

• Inspect your property before quoting you a price or beginning any pesticide application.

• Give you a written inspection report and an action plan of how to prepare for treatment and prevent further infestation.

• Base quotes on inspection findings, not flat fees. The cheapest services are not necessarily the best.

• Visit often until the job is done.

• Employ qualified, well-trained pest management professionals.

• Educate you on how to prevent bed bugs.

• Work with you until the bed bugs are gone.
ABOUT THE USE OF PESTICIDES

Bed bug infestations can require the use of pesticides. Only licensed professionals should apply pesticides. Foggers and bug bombs are not effective against bed bugs.

Ask the professional to:

• Use the least-toxic, most effective pesticide.

• Follow all instructions and warnings.

• Tell you when it’s safe to re-enter a treated room.

• Never spray the tops of mattresses or sofas and, if needed, use only small amounts of pesticides on their seams.

To report or ask about pesticide exposures call the Poison Control Center 24 hours a day at (800) 222-1222.

For more information about pesticide products, call the National Pesticide Information Center at (800) 858-7378.
WHAT CAN BE DONE TO SUPPORT THE WORK OF A PROFESSIONAL

Everyone should learn how to inspect and identify bed bugs. Cleaning and disinfecting will help to reduce the spread of bed bugs, but may not get rid of them totally.

Tools You Can Use

• Bright flashlight

• Small mirror, ideally one with a handle, available from most hardware stores

• Magnifying glass

• Paper towels

• Vacuum with crevice tool, brush and plenty of vacuum bags

• Putty knife, playing card or subway card to use as a crevice tool

• Garbage bags

• Plastic packing tape

• Bucket of soapy water and sponge
CLEAN AND DISINFECT

• Get rid of clutter to reduce places bed bugs can hide. After checking for bed bugs, consider putting non-essential belongings into storage until they are gone from your home. Check all items again before returning.

• Wipe off dead bugs, blood stains, eggs and droppings with hot soapy water.

• Wash all items showing bed bug stains in hot water (140F) and dry on the highest setting for at least 20 minutes. Other clean items suspected of having bed bugs should be placed in a hot dryer for at least 20 minutes to kill the bugs. After drying, store items in sealed plastic bags until you are sure you have gotten rid of bed bugs.

• Vacuum carpets, floors, bed frames, furniture, cracks and crevices daily, using the brush and crevice tools. Empty the vacuum or seal and dispose of its bag outside of your home after each use.

• Enclose infested mattresses and box springs in a cover that is labeled “allergen rated,” “for dust mites,” or “for bed bugs” for a full year. Periodically check for rips or openings and if discovered, seal immediately.

TRAP AND KILL BED BUGS

• Force bed bugs out of cracks and crevices with a putty knife or playing card.

• Catch them with sticky packing tape or crush them in paper towels.
SEAL CRACKS AND CREVICES

• Repair cracks in plaster, repair or remove any loose wallpaper and tighten light switch covers.

• Apply caulk to seal crevices and joints in baseboards and gaps on shelving or cabinets.

GET RID OF INFESTED ITEMS

• In most cases it is not necessary to get rid of furniture or bedding at the first sign of bed bugs. Cleaning and enclosing is often an adequate solution.

• Box springs should only be discarded if they are heavily infested and cannot be covered.

• Use plastic sheeting (shrink /pallet wrap) or place securely in plastic bags any items to be thrown away. Label with a sign that says “infested with bed bugs.”
AWAY from home

PREPARING FOR TRAVEL

As members of a highly mobile society, you may encounter bed bugs when you travel for business or pleasure. There are many common sense steps that you can take to prepare for travel. This guide offers advice on steps you can take to protect yourself from bed bugs while traveling.

You may also encounter bed bugs in other public places, such as retail stores. Increased awareness is the best defense.
TIPS FOR TRAVELERS

Bed bugs have become a common pest throughout the United States. You can come into contact with them anywhere, especially when you travel. However, this does not mean that you should not travel. The good news is that most hotels and convention facilities have developed bed bug surveillance programs, and their managers and staff know how to check their rooms for evidence of bed bugs. However, even the most diligent surveillance may miss a new infestation. Here are a few precautions to take as you prepare for travel.

While Packing:

• Take just what you need for the trip.

• As you are packing your suitcases, place your clothing, shoes, and toiletries in sealable plastic bags.

• Pack a couple of large sealable bags in your luggage to store things you’ve worn.
On Your Trip:

• Ask to inspect your hotel room before you accept it. Turn back the comforter, sheets and mattress pad. Look for bed bug fecal spots.

• Don’t place your suitcases on the bed or on the floor. Store them in the bathtub.

• Keep your belongings in the suitcase.

• Don’t put items that you’ve worn back in your suitcase. Put them into a sealable plastic bag.

• Don’t put items you buy on the trip - especially shoes and clothing- in your suitcase. Put them in sealable plastic bags.

• Before packing to leave the hotel, inspect your luggage for bed bugs. Place everything in plastic bags and then into your suitcases.

Once You Are Home:

• Leave your luggage in the garage, or outside. Do NOT take it in the house.

• Remove the items in your suitcase and inspect them for bed bugs. Store clothing in the garage or outside until they can be washed and dried (in a hot dryer) for 20 minutes. Items that cannot be dried at a high temperature should be dry-cleaned.
RETAIL STORES/THEATERS

Movie theaters, Libraries

Bed bugs have been found to invade any building that harbors carpet, excess fabrics and furniture. Most movie theater seats are now upholstered and create the perfect hiding and breeding spot for bed bugs, which are carried via people and their clothing.
Garage Sale/ReSale Shops

Bed bugs are often spread through used furniture. It is best to buy new furniture, but if you acquire used furniture, such as a bed or couch, carefully inspect it before bringing it indoors. Check the seams and stitching for bed bugs or blood spots. If you find bed bugs on furniture, do not purchase it. No dumpster diving. If it’s in a dumpster or garbage can; leave it there. Even if it’s the perfect plant stand, the previous owner may have thrown it away because it is infested with bed bugs.

Retail Stores

The likelihood that you are going to encounter bed bugs in a retail store is extremely remote. Retail stores are not ideal environments for bed bugs as people are not sleeping there nor sitting still long enough for bed bugs to feed. Therefore, if bugs are found in these environments they were most likely introduced from either a shopper or employee that has a problem at home. Inspect the items you purchase at these stores. Again, the chance you are going to encounter bed bugs in a retail store are low due to the biology and behavior of bed bugs.
**Do’s**

- Wash all of your bedding in hot water and dry on the hottest setting possible for a minimum of 20 minutes.
- Wash or dry clean all of your clothing in hot water and dry them in a hot dryer for at least 20 minutes.
- Eliminate clutter from your home. Store things that you want to keep in tightly covered plastic totes.
- Thoroughly vacuum the floor and baseboards in rooms that have bed bugs. Promply discard vacuum contents outside.

- Contact your landlord or apartment manager immediately.
- Use a licensed pest exterminator.
- Follow your exterminator’s instructions to prepare your home for treatment.
- Limit visitors to your home until the bed bugs are gone.
- Check your clothing and shoes before you leave the house.
- Use an anti-itching medicine on welts to relieve the itching. Over-the-counter creams will work, but prescription anti-itching medicine may be better.
Eliminating bed bugs from beds can be challenging. If there are holes or tears in the fabric the bed bugs and eggs may be inside, as well as outside. There are also restrictions on how mattresses can be treated with pesticides. For these reasons companies sometimes recommend that a mattress be discarded and destroyed, especially when heavily infested or in poor condition.

Another option is to encase both the mattress and box spring in a protective cover like those used for allergy relief. Encasements specifically designed to help protect against bed bugs are available through retail outlets or pest control firms. Once the cover is installed and zipped shut, bugs that happen to be inside are entombed and eventually die. Encasements also help protect newly purchased beds, and make it easier to spot and destroy any bugs residing on the outer surface during subsequent examination. Encasements will not, however, keep bed bugs from crawling onto a bed and biting a sleeping person.
CHECKLIST

Making your bed bug problem worse:

DO NOT

• Ignore the problem. It will only get worse.

• File a complaint until you’ve given your landlord an opportunity to correct the problem.

• Try to treat your home yourself. There is nothing that you can buy that is safe for you to use.

• Use fly spray to kill bed bugs. It doesn’t work.

• Use farm and garden insecticides or boric acid in the house. They can be toxic.
DO NOT

- Spray rubbing alcohol in the house. It is extremely flammable.

- Throw away your furniture unless your exterminator tells you that he cannot treat it. Completely destroy anything that you throw away.

- Give or loan clothing, furniture, toys or other personal belongings to anyone while you have bed bugs.

- Scratch the bed bug bites, or you may develop a serious skin infection.

REFERENCES

http://www.epa.gov/bedbugs/
http://www.epa.gov/bedbugs/productsearch