

# BED BUGS: What you need to know



*bed bug on rice to show size relationship ▲*

## **What are bed bugs?**

Bed bugs are small, oval, non-flying insects that feed by sucking blood from humans or animals. A member of the insect family Cimicidae, they are one of three species that bite people. Adult bed bugs reach 5-7 mm in length (about the size of an apple seed or a lentil), while nymphs (juveniles) are as small as 1.5 mm.

Bed bugs have flat bodies, and are often mistaken for ticks or a small insect. The adults are reddish brown in color, but can appear more reddish after feeding on a blood meal. Nymphs are clear in color and appear bright red after feeding. Bed bugs do not have the ability to fly, and they travel by crawling from one surface to another. Unlike mosquitoes, bed bugs cannot transmit diseases. They are nocturnal, and have their highest periods of activity just before dawn.

## **Where are bed bugs commonly found?**

Bed bugs can be found in any living environment, up to and including high-cost luxury hotels and resorts. They can exist even in the cleanest of environments, and are not a reflection of an individual's personal hygiene. They are spread by "hitching a ride" on clothing, luggage, bed linens, in furniture, carpets, curtains and other possessions, including computers and electronic equipment. Bed bugs could also travel within walls through buildings, on pipes, or along cracks and crevices. They are generally not spread by person-to-person contact.

## **Why are they such a problem now?**

Bed bugs were fairly common in this country prior to World War II, but became more rare after pesticides, such as DDT, were used to eradicate them. They continued to be prevalent outside this country, and it is believed that the recent resurgence of them across the country is the result of several factors, including increased travel in and out of the country, and the reduced usage of strong pesticides.

## **How do I know if I have bed bugs? What do I look for?**

If you suspect that you have bed bugs in your residence, use a flashlight to check for them hiding in the mattress, box spring and bed frame. Look for small, reddish spots on the mattress. Be sure to look under the mattress and along the seams or edges. Search other furniture as well, and look along the perimeters of your room.

To be certain it is a bed bug, use clear tape to attach the bug to a white piece of paper so that it can be properly identified.

## **What should I do if I think I have bed bugs?**

Act quickly, but do not try to get rid of the bugs yourself. Well-intentioned steps such as tossing out any items you think might be affected, or relocating to another room, could spread the problem to other rooms or hallways. You should, however, immediately wash all your bed linens and clothes in hot water and dry them for a full cycle on "high heat."

On-campus students should notify **Housing Services at 610-758-3500** to schedule

**Sources for this publication include the following:**

Centers for Disease Control  
Pennsylvania Department  
of Health  
Cornell University  
BedBugCentral.com  
Medicine.Net.com

an inspection of your room, and off-campus students should notify their landlord.

If evidence of bed bugs is found in an on-campus residence hall, Residential Services will initiate the highly effective, multi-phase extermination process that is administered by a licensed exterminator.

**What does a bed bug bite look like?**

Bed bug bites cause large, itchy bumps, But, it can take up to 14 days for the bumps to develop on some people.

Bed bug bites are usually self limiting, and require little attention other than antiseptic creams or lotions to prevent infections at the bite site. If a secondary infection occurs (usually from scratching), apply a local antiseptic lotion or antibiotic cream or ointment. Creams with corticosteroids and oral antihistamines may be advised in the presence of allergic reaction or larger skin reactions.

**Is a visit to the Health Center necessary?**

Evaluation by a clinician is optional. If you suspect that you have been bitten, you can call the university's **Health and Wellness Center at 610-758-3870** to schedule an appointment at the Health Center, which is located on the third floor of Johnson Hall.

The Health and Wellness Center is open from 8:15 a.m. to 4:15 p.m. Monday through Friday, and from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday *(Please note that the Saturday clinic is for urgent health concerns only).*

**Is there anything that can be done to prevent bed bugs?**

Since the bed bugs are so small and can effectively hide for extended periods of time, a true preventative approach requires regular vigilance, particularly when staying away from your campus home. **However, the following steps have been effective in limited them:**

- Check your bed and bed linens periodically, and wash them frequently in hot water and dry them for a full cycle on "high heat."
- Check your backpack and laptop cases, taking particular care to look in seams and pouches. Place backpacks and purses on non-fabric surfaces instead of carpeted ones, beds or furniture with upholstery.
- Keep clutter to a minimum in your room, which reduces the places where bed bugs can hide.
- Do not bring second-hand clothing or furniture into your home prior to inspecting, washing and treating them as necessary.
- When traveling, put your luggage on a rack or on the bathroom floor—not on your bed.
- Examine your hotel room for bed bugs, and let the hotel desk know if you suspect that the bugs may be in your room.
- Vacuum your luggage when you return home, preferably before bringing it into your house.
- Keep travel clothes separate from other laundry. Upon returning, wash them in warm water and dry them on high heat for a full cycle.