

Important Info About Bed Bugs

"Good night, sleep tight, don't let the bed bugs bite".

Most of us have heard this more times than we can count, but have always taken it as little more than a nighttime sentiment. Just a few decades ago, however, bed bugs played a very real role in our sleeping arrangements.

Due to the widespread use of DDT's in the 1940s and 1950s, bed bugs were all but exterminated in the United States. But these nocturnal pests are making a comeback. Hotels and motels, for example, often fall victim to bed bug infestations.

This rising trend may be attributed to the number of travelers moving throughout the United States. Bed bugs are left behind in the rented rooms, and the next guests can unwittingly pick up the pests and bring them home.

It can be hard to determine if your home is housing bed bugs. It's hard to spot these tiny creatures with the naked eye, so be on the lookout for other telltale signs. Understanding more about the critters can help you to determine if you have them, and can assist you in the extermination.

Species

Bed bugs belong to the Cimicidae family of insects. In general, these insects are small, flat, brownish in color and nocturnal by nature. This specific branch of the Cimicidae family lives by feeding on human and animal blood.

The most common household bed bugs are *Cimex lectularius*. These are regularly found feeding on human blood, and have adapted to living in human environments. Common to temperate climates, these parasites have been tormenting people since the ancient times.

Cimex hemipterus is another type of bed bug that is commonly found in more tropical regions like Florida. This type of bed bug also infests bats and poultry. Another species of bed bug called *Leptocimex boueti* is found in West Africa and South America, and happily feeds on both bats and humans. Bed bug species' known as *Cimex pilosellus* and *C. pipistrella* primarily infest bats, while *Haematosiphon inodora*, a North American species, targets poultry.

Physical Characteristics

Adult bed bugs are oval and flattened in shape. They are small, reddish brown and wingless. Many people think that bed bugs are so small and move so quickly that they are not visible to the naked eye. Adult bed bugs grow 4 to 5 millimeters in length, often compared to apple seeds. Although they move quickly, they are not as fast as people perceive them to be. The reason that people don't typically spot bed bugs is that the insects lay still in the bed, sofa and mattress crevices, only surfacing while people are sleeping.

Newly hatched bed bugs, called nymphs, are translucent. As the insects reach maturity, their color becomes darker.

Feeding Habits

Although it is physically possible for bed bugs to feed on human blood anytime of the day, they are generally active and feed only at night. The peak activity time for these insects is about one hour before dawn.

Like other insects that feed on human blood, such as head lice, a bed bug will inject an anesthetic into the host's skin. This anesthetic numbs the skin so that the human host won't feel the piercing and sucking. The process of "numbing" and sucking is made possible with the use of two hollow tubes. One tube releases saliva containing both an anticoagulant and an anesthetic, while the other tube withdraws the blood.

Bed bugs will feed for about five minutes, and then immediately return to their hiding places in mattresses and pillows. These insects can lie dormant for more than a year without feeding, which is one reason that it can be so difficult to be completely rid of an infestation.

Health Risks

Some blood-sucking insects, such as mosquitoes, carry disease such as Dengue (Yellow Fever) and Malaria. While some people fear that bed bugs can carry and transmit diseases such as HIV and Hepatitis B, there is no scientific proof to that effect.

While not considered by scientists to carry serious health risks, the bite of a bed bug may cause severe itching and skin marks in the affected area. Scratching the bitten area can lead to skin infections and scars that may require medical attention from a dermatologist. Calamine lotion can be applied to the bites, to reduce itch and redness. Be sure to wash the area with warm water and germicidal soap before applying calamine lotion.

If you think that you and your home have fallen victim to bed bugs, take immediate measures. These insects can be extremely difficult to deal with, so call a professional exterminator to get the job done once and for all.

