



Bed bugs (Cimicidae)

What are bed bugs?

Bed bugs are small wingless insects that feed solely on the blood of mammals (warm-blooded animals such as humans, birds and bats). Cimicidae are commonly called bed bugs because they feed at night (when people are asleep) and live closest to where people sleep (in mattress seams, mattress interiors, bed frames, furniture, carpeting and bedroom clutter).

What are the symptoms?

Bed bugs are attracted by warmth and carbon dioxide. The bug bite causes a skin reaction, which is usually seen as small itchy bumps and may be in a line or a cluster. The skin reaction resembles those caused by other kinds of blood feeding insects, such as mosquitoes or fleas. These reactions can range from very mild to serious secondary infections, with scabbing or scarring due to scratching the irritated bites. Bed bugs are not known to spread disease.

How are bed bugs spread?

Bed bugs are usually brought into the home in suitcases, handbags and on clothing and furniture. Previously owned furniture or mattresses are a perfect way for bed bugs and their eggs to be brought into the home. They can also travel between apartments. Keeping the home clean and free from clutter can minimize the infestation.

What are signs of bed bugs?

- Look at the bed linens and mattress seams at night. Bed bugs will be moving around and can be seen with the naked eye.
- Small bloodstains will appear on sheets and mattresses.
- Itchy bites in a row or clustered on the body usually on arms, legs and back.

If you see any of these signs please contact an exterminator or your landlord if you are renting. Early treatment will help prevent further infestation.

How are bed bug bites treated?

For bed bug bites:

- Apply topical cortisone creams or ointments to relieve itching.
- Apply an antiseptic/antibiotic cream/ointment to any breaks in the skin to prevent any secondary infections.
- Take antihistamines if needed to help relieve allergic reactions.
- Consult your health care provider if you suffer any severe reactions.

How is the home treated for bed bugs?

For bed bugs in the home:

- Contact a certified/licensed pest control operator to apply any needed pesticides (if you rent your home, contact your landlord).
- Prepare your home for the pest control operator:
Remove any clutter.
Place all bedding in a sealed plastic bag or container during treatment. After treatment is finished, wash in hot water before use.

Vacuum and dispose of the vacuum bag (outside), clean vacuum before bringing inside.

Empty dresser drawers and closets and place contents in sealed bag or container; after treatment wash/dry all clothes in hot water.

Keep all clothes in tightly sealed containers until all bed bugs are gone. At least two treatments are usually needed.

How are bed bugs prevented?

- Wear nightclothes that cover as much skin as possible.
- Inspect any room that you will be sleeping in while traveling.
- Wash any clothing worn while traveling in hot water as soon as possible upon returning home.
- Inspect suitcases carefully and vacuum them out as soon as possible upon returning home (leaving them in a closed vehicle in full summer heat may help as well).
- Inspect antiques and used furniture thoroughly before bringing them into your home.
- Change and wash bed linens at least once a week in hot water.
- Vacuum around the home at least once a week, paying special attention to areas surrounding the bed. Empty collection container or remove bag outside and dispose of properly.
- Remove excessive clutter in the home.
- Avoid allowing the bed covers (comforters, etc.) to touch the floor.

For more information, contact the Guilford County Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Division at (336) 641-3771 or www.myguilford.com