

Q and A

BED BUGS



Bed bugs are small insects that feed mainly on human blood. There are plenty of theories about the cause of our latest pest problem but there is no doubt that they are here. Bed bugs are causing problems in hotels, movie theaters, stores and even office buildings throughout the United States. Like the rest of the nation, Imperial County is experiencing a resurgence of these blood-sucking insects. You can find yourself with bed bugs at home too!

What do bed bugs look like and where do they live?



Bed bugs start out very small about $1/16^{\text{th}}$ of an inch in size. They are almost impossible to see without a magnifying glass and are nearly clear in color. As they feed and grow they become red-brown and are less than a $1/4$ inch in size. The one in the picture is just about full size and is in the process of ingesting a blood meal from the arm of a human host. Bed bugs become bloated after feeding. Being flat helps them to hide more easily. Any crack about the thickness of a credit card can harbor a bed bug. These pests tend to hide on or near a bed so they are close to their food source (people). As the infestation gets worse they spread further. Older females with eggs may move away from the males.



Mattress with bedbugs

What would be a good indication that a bed might have bugs in it? What do I look for in a hotel?

The picture (below left) shows a severely infested mattress from a hotel. The spots and staining in the photo are a combination of dried blood and fecal matter deposited by bed bugs. Other items of furniture may be infested too. The picture below is from a wall unit. Sofas, chairs, electronic equipment, televisions, radios and computers can all serve as perfect hiding places. The picture below also shows shed skins and an elongated engorged adult.



How can I stop bed bugs from coming home with me after I travel?

The simplest way to prevent bed bugs from hitch-hiking a ride home is to put your possessions where the bugs can't reach them. These pests have no wings and cannot fly. They don't hop like fleas though they are about as quick as ants. Bed bugs can't climb slippery surfaces very well. A table with chromed legs or steel chairs are hard for them to climb. Dry bath tubs can also be a good place to store your luggage. Avoid using dressers and closets. Don't store anything on the floor especially if it is carpeted. Consider taking trash bags with you to seal up your luggage and dirty laundry. When you leave store everything in the trunk of your car.

What do bed bug "bites" look like and can they spread disease?

- Bed bugs are not considered to be carriers of any disease.
- Some people will show no sign of having been bitten while others can have an allergic reaction to the bites. Bites can cause extreme itching and annoyance and infection from scratching.
- Generally people that have been bitten notice itchy red welts that may take several days to go away. Notice how the bites in the picture are in a line. This is common with bed bugs as they tend to bite multiple times along a vein.
- Sometimes bed bug welts will be in clusters rather than lines. Bed bug bites can be anywhere on the body.
- Bed bugs also cause stress and sleep loss.



I think I have bed bugs in my house...what should I do?

Remain calm. Don't be embarrassed.

Anybody can get bed bugs and it is not a sign of sloppiness. People who find bed bugs should know:

- Getting rid of bed bugs is not an easy process.
- Most cases of bed bug infestation will require treatment by a pest-control expert who can verify if the bugs are bed bugs or another insect. Only professionals should apply pesticides for bed bugs.
- Ask the professional to use the least-toxic pesticide labeled for bed bugs that will be effective.
- A pest control company can determine if the mattress can be disinfected or must be discarded. Since beds cannot readily be treated with insecticides, it's often necessary to discard infested mattresses and beds.
- Those who try to eliminate bed bugs themselves are advised to read the labels carefully on any insecticides that are used and be aware that foggers and "bug bombs" won't get under the carpet and into some of the areas these pests live so they are not effective.

If I know of an apartment complex/hotel/motel that has a bed bug problem what should I do? Where can I report it?

If you know of a building with a bed bug issue you can report it to the City Planning Department or to Imperial County Environmental Health.

Tenants should immediately notify the building manager if they suspect an infestation, delay will make the infestation worse. Housing authorities can enforce laws related to rodents, bed bugs as well as buildings that are unsafe due to electrical, plumbing and other structural concerns.

Remember, bed bugs can be controlled and eradicated but it is better to prevent them from becoming a problem. Consider a routine inspection of your house if you frequently travel, especially to areas known to have bed bug problems. Bed bugs, even just the thought of them, cause many sleepless nights and take the joy out of being home. Please contact our office if you need more information or if we can be of any assistance to you.



Imperial County Public Health Department
Environmental Health
797 Main St., Suite B
El Centro, CA 92243
Phone (760) 336-8530, FAX (760) 352-1309