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Integrated Pest Management in the Home Series: Bed Bugs[1]

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The purpose of this publication is to address commonly asked questions on bed bugs that are received from the public. It is part of the *Integrated Pest Management in the Home* series.

Introduction

Bed bugs are wingless, blood-feeding insects. Adults are about 3/16-inch long, broadly flat, oval and brownish, though their color can change to reddish-brown after they feed. They generally feed for three to 10 minutes at night while people sleep at a frequency of once per seven to 10 days. Bites can itch but clear up within two to three weeks. Bed bug infestations are preventable and controllable, and a bed bug infestation, while unpleasant, does not put people at risk of disease. Bed bug bites are not known to transmit pathogens that can cause diseases in humans.

Bed Bug FAQs

How do I know if I have bed bugs?

- Most people realize they have a bed bug infestation when they are bitten and notice that they are itching. However, not everyone will react to bed bug bites. It may take several days for bites to become visible depending on the person.
- Evidence of infestation includes the presence of live bed bugs of all stages (eggs, nymphs, and adults) (Figure 1), cast skins, and spots of partially digested blood (i.e., bed bug feces) on sheets, or clothing and furniture (Figure 2).
- A musty odor. Some people describe the scent of a severe bed bug infestation as a musty or sweet odor, like coriander. If you notice an unusual smell in your bedroom, it could be a sign of an infestation.
- Contact your local UF/IFAS Extension office for proper identification and resources. Different pests will require different control recommendations.



Figure 1. Life stages of the bed bug. Nymphs and adults vary greatly in size and shape. Stages that are red are engorged after feeding on someone.
Credit: A. Allison, National Pest Management Association, used with permission.



Figure 2. Evidence of bed bugs. This image shows bed bug egg cases after nymphs hatch and partially digested blood excreted after bed bugs feed on human blood.
Credit: UF/IFAS.

How did I get bed bugs?

Bed bugs are transported into our homes via luggage; clothing, including shoes (Figure 3); bedding; furniture; etc. Once established indoors, they can spread from room to room and to adjacent units in multi-family housing by residents.



Figure 3. Bed bugs are transported into homes by hitchhiking on clothes, shoes, backpacks, furniture, etc. This image shows an adult bed bug lodged in a shoe tread.
Credit: S. Jones, The Ohio State University, used with permission.

How do I get rid of bed bugs?

How to get rid of bed bugs depends on the level of infestation and whether it is an "introduction," a single bed bug, or an "infestation," at least two bed bugs present and at least two parts of the bed bug lifecycle represented.

For a bed bug **introduction** (e.g., one insect on luggage or clothing), simply remove it, then crush it and discard it.

For an **infestation** (any combination of more than one life stage or signs of same, including eggs, nymphs, cast skins, and adult bed bugs):

- It may take more than one treatment to kill the adults, nymphs, and eggs.
- Your vacuum cleaner and dryer are your best friends. One female bed bug can lay 200 eggs in her lifetime. Vacuum mattresses, sofas, and chairs, paying special attention to seams where bed bugs can hide. Also, headboard, footboard, bedframe, and baseboards or crevices nearby. Remove the vacuum cleaner bag immediately after vacuuming and dispose of it in the outside garbage.
- Put bedding, clothing, and other items that can withstand heat in a dryer at the highest heat setting (~140ºF) for 20–30 minutes.
- Use high quality mattress and pillow encasements to prevent bed bugs from infesting your mattress—and to trap any existing bed bugs inside so they are prevented from biting you.
- Steam cleaning is recommended (Figure 4). Use low pressure to make sure not to blow the bed bugs off beds and furniture.
- Inspect after treatment. Use a flashlight, bed bug traps, or interceptor devices.
- Contact a licensed pest control professional with experience in bed bug control.



Figure 4. Steam demonstration for bed bug control. Pay careful attention to seams where bed bugs hide.
Credit: F. Oi, UF/IFAS.

If you see a bed bug, save it to confirm its identification. Place it in a container or vial with a lid containing rubbing alcohol. Do not place the bed bug on tape. Be specific about where you found the bed bug. The University of Florida's Department of Entomology and Nematology has an insect identification laboratory that can provide identifications.

What should I *not* do?

Bug bombs, herbal remedies, and homemade treatments are ineffective. More information can be found in "What Not to Do for Bed Bugs/Qué No Hacer contra las Chinches" (Oi et al. 2023).

Do bed bugs spread disease?

A common concern is that bed bugs have been associated with pathogens that spread disease. Although bed bugs can harbor pathogens in their bodies, transmission to humans has not occurred.

How far do bed bugs travel?

In one laboratory study, bed bugs traveled 4.9 meters (about 16 feet) in five minutes (Haynes et al 2008). (But of course they can and do travel much, much longer distances by hitching a ride on a handy human.)

Can bed bugs be found on/survive on my pet?

Bed bugs do not live on pets as fleas or ticks do, and pets are not common hosts (Vail 2021).

I am a renter. Is my landlord required to treat for bed bugs? Will renter's insurance cover treatment?

Most renters' insurance does not cover treatment for bed bugs or damage from bed bugs.

We recommend reading your lease carefully. While there are provisions to Florida Statute 83.51(2)(a) that sets out the requirements for landlords to make reasonable provisions for maintenance, including pest control, you must read your contracts carefully because landlords can assign pest control as a responsibility to the tenant. Also, it is important to understand that pest control contracts for bed bugs, rodents, and termites can sometimes be separate (e.g., additional) to a "general household pest" contract.

References and Additional Information

Florida Statute 83.51 Landlord's obligation to maintain premises. http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=0000-0099/0083/Sections/0083.51.html

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What Are Bed Bugs? video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hVvjl2WCd0c (Accessed July 24, 2025)

For more information, contact your local Extension office: https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/find-your-local-office/ (Accessed July 24, 2025)

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