

Beware of Bed Bugs

There have been several newspaper articles reporting on the return of the bed bug. Jeffrey Hahn, Assistant Extension Entomologist, wrote about their return. Not only do people find them in their homes but more and more they are found in other sites. They are found in dormitories and places you stay when you travel, such as hotels, motels, and hostels. You might be tempted to believe that this is a problem only where the lack of cleanliness is an issue, but how clean a room is has no bearing on the presence of bed bugs. Meticulously kept homes and five star hotels can be just as susceptible to bed bugs.

Most people living today have never seen a live bed bug as this insect had all but disappeared shortly after World War II. However, entomologists and the pest management industry have noticed their resurgence over the last six to eight years. They believe that the current increase in bed bugs is due to a combination of factors including travel outside the U.S., and immigration into the U.S. from bed bug endemic areas. Also, selling and rental of used mattresses, box springs and furniture, reduced use of residual insecticides, and a lack of experience by the current generations of pest management technicians on the proper treatment of this pest.

A lack of awareness about bed bugs is also a problem. Some people are bitten for weeks or even months before bed bugs are properly diagnosed because they don't even consider that they're a possible cause. In fact, some people believe bed bugs are just a myth, a creature that doesn't even occur any more. However, make no mistake about it; bed bugs are real and definitely on the increase not only in Minnesota but in all of the areas of the country.

An adult bed bug is about 1/8th inch long, reddish brown, oval, and flattened. In a lot of respects, it is similar in appearance to a wood tick. An immature bed bug is very similar but smaller. The flattened body of a bed bug allows it to hide in any small crack or crevice which makes them so difficult to detect as well as so easily transported in luggage, bags, boxes and furniture.

Bed bugs hide during the day and come out at night to feed. They take up to 10 minutes to take a full blood meal, although their victims are seldom aware of these bites. They can be found anywhere on the body, generally where skin is uncovered. People react differently to bed bug bites. Some will experience itchy welts or swelling while others show no reaction at all. While their bites are unpleasant, there fortunately aren't any diseases associated with bed bugs. They will feed at regular intervals when hosts are readily available but they are quite resistant to starvation. Immature bed bugs can survive several months without feeding while adults can go over a year without a meal.

It is not surprising that bed bugs are most commonly found in bedrooms and other rooms used for sleeping where they are most commonly associated with various bed parts, such as mattresses, box springs, and headboards, as well as under edges of carpets and rugs, on walls, and behind baseboards. Surprisingly they are also commonly found in non-sleeping rooms including living rooms, bathrooms, kitchens, and laundry rooms.

There are several signs of bed bugs that can help you detect them. The most obvious is to find live bed bugs themselves as well as their molted skins. Remember that they will be hiding under, behind, and in just about any small space you can imagine. You may also discover dark reddish brown fecal matter stains on sheets, walls and

furniture. This matter is mostly composed of undigested blood, which explains its color. Sometimes a sickly sweet odor is associated with severe bed bug infestations. Bed bugs are very challenging to eliminate and an experienced pest management service should control them. The first step in controlling bed bugs is a very thorough inspection of the bedroom and other rooms in the home. You can help control bed bugs in part through nonchemical means. Infested sheets, pillowcases, or clothes can be laundered in hot water at least 120° f. You may also set items in freezing temperatures under 32° f for at least two weeks. However, you need at least 30 days to kill the eggs.

In the end, a technician needs to apply residual insecticides into all bed bug harborage areas to control them. This may be a liquid or dust or even sometimes as an aerosol application. The success of a treatment depends on how well the room is prepared. That is removing pictures and other objects from the walls, beds, and other places. Due to the complexity of a bed bug job, it is likely that a pest management service will need to return and treat again to completely eliminate them.

Submitted by Jerry Vitalis
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