



Health News from the DCF Medical Team

Bed Bugs

Bedbugs have feasted on sleeping humans for thousands of years. They were eradicated from most developed nations with the use of DDT, which has since been banned. Reports of infestations are up 5000% as are the number of attacks. Bedbugs are flat, wingless and measure about 1/4". They have 6 legs, are a shiny reddish-brown and they appear dark brown and swollen after biting humans. Adults can live up to 1 year without feeding while nymphs can survive for months.

How are Bed Bugs spread?

Bedbugs do not care if their environment is clean or dirty. All they need is a warm host and plenty of hiding places. Bedbugs do not usually stay on human hosts after meals, but they may take refuge in clothes or luggage left nearby or on the floor.

What locations are at risk for infestation?

Bedbugs are more common in crowded areas that experience high turnover rate. Infestations have been reported in a variety of places that one would not expect, such as hospitals, movie theaters and high-end clothing stores. Common places that are at risk for infestation are:

- Apartment complexes
- Homeless shelters
- Military barracks
- Dormitories
- Hotels
- Refugee camps

Where do Bed Bugs hide?

- Mattresses and box springs
- Under carpeting near baseboards
- Cracks in furniture (bed frames and bureaus)
- In seams of furniture, clothes and luggage
- Under peeling paint and wallpaper
- Behind light switch plates or electrical outlets

What are the signs and symptoms of Bed Bug bites?

Some people have no reaction at all to bedbug bites, while others experience an allergic reaction that can include severe itching, blisters or hives. It can be difficult to distinguish bedbug bites from other insect bites. In general, bedbug bites usually are:

- Red, often with a darker red spot in the middle
- Arranged in a rough line or in a cluster,
- Itchy
- Located on the face, neck, arms and hands

How are Bed Bug bites treated?

Most bites require no medical treatment. Consult your health care provider if you experience an allergic reaction or develop a skin infection after scratching. The itching associated with bites can be treated with either a cream containing hydrocortisone or an oral antihistamine (i.e. Benadryl)

How can you tell if you have Bed Bugs?

If you suspect that you have bed bugs, immediately inspect your home. Look in all the places where they can hide and for:

- Dark specks: typically found along seams, these specks are bedbug excrement;
- Empty exoskeletons: bedbugs molt 5 times before becoming adults. The empty skins are light brown;
- Bloody smears: you may find small smears of blood on the sheets where you accidentally crushed an engorged bug.

How can you treat a Bed Bug infestation?

Some professional exterminators use portable devices to produce steam, heat or freezing temperatures to kill bedbugs. In some cases, you may have to throw out heavily infested items such as mattresses or couches. Non-chemical treatments include:

- Vacuuming: thoroughly vacuum all hiding places. Place the vacuum bag in a plastic bag, seal it and dispose of it outside.
- Hot water: wash all washables (clothes, towels, linens, flip-flops and vacuum attachments) in hot water (at least 120° F)
- Clothes dryer: Place wet or dry items in a dryer (including vacuum brushes) set at medium to high heat for 20 minutes
- Freezing: bedbugs are vulnerable to freezing temperatures (below 32° F), but you need to freeze them for several days
- Sealing: seal all mattresses, pillows and non-washable items in a plastic or hypoallergenic zipped cover for up to 1 year.

Place glue boards or sticky tape on the floor around the 4 posts of the bed frames. This can catch the bugs and gives you a way to monitor the effectiveness of your efforts.

If renting, all infestations should be reported to the landlord. Contact the local Board of Health as necessary.

How can you prevent bringing Bed Bugs home with you?

- Roll up pant legs when doing home visits so bed bugs cannot attach to your clothing.
- Do not put bags on the floor or on furniture. When traveling, keep luggage on a luggage rack and clothes off the floor.
- Do not sit on upholstered furniture if you suspect a home has bed bugs.
- If you think a home has bed bugs, weather permissible, wear flip-flops in the home and change shoes once outside. Then, either throw away the flip-flops or wash and dry as above.