

Bed Bugs: What Communities Need to Know

Over the past few years, there has been an increase in bed bug activity in the United States. Southeast Kansas is also experiencing bed bug infestations of homes and public spaces. Neither blissful ignorance or constant worrying about a bed bug infestation is a wise course of action. Instead, we recommend a healthy awareness of the situation. By educating our yourself, you can reduce the likelihood of these pests becoming a problem for your family.

What are bed bugs?

- Bed bugs are small, brownish, flattened insects that feed on the blood of people while they sleep (they are the size of a tic or apple seed)
- Adult bed bugs are rust brown in color but change to a deep red after a blood meal
- Fast runners with thin bodies that make them hard to detect as they hide in narrow cracks and crevices
- They do not jump or fly



Symptoms of Bed Bug Bites:

- Usually cause itchy, red bumps in a group or line
- Often they look like a hive or mosquito bite
- Bite may have a red dot (puncture) in the center. This is where the bed bug bit through the skin.
- Occasionally, a small blister can occur in the center
- Bites are usually on exposed skin (arms, legs and face)
- Bites are usually first noted in the morning



Signs of Bed Bug Infestation:

- Bug bites
- Bugs, eggs, shells or bug feces on sheets, mattress, or box springs
- Finding dead bugs in the dryer lint trap
- Confirmation of bed bugs requires finding and identifying the bugs themselves that often requires the help of a professional.



How Do Bed Bugs Spread?

Bed bugs will hide during the day and only come out to feed during the night. Unlike head lice, they do not live on a person. However, they can hitchhike from one place to another in backpacks, clothing, luggage, books and other items. Actual bed bug infestations in schools and public spaces are uncommon. More commonly, a few bed bugs will hitchhike to a new location from an infested home by hiding in a person's clothing, coat, purse, or backpack. Bed bugs that hitch a ride on one person can then be carried home by another person, making public spaces a potential place for bed bug spread. Bed bugs can also be carried directly from one home to another. While clutter does not cause bed bugs, it does provide more places for bed bugs to hide and can make treatment and extermination more difficult.

How Can I Prevent Getting Bed Bugs?

While there is no way to completely prevent bed bug infestations, there are steps you can take to avoid an infestation, stop the spread of an infestation, or detect an infestation sooner:

- Avoid clutter, especially on the floor, which provides a hiding place for the bugs.
- Keep your bed clear! Don't place dirty clothes, books, purses, bags, etc. on your bed.
- Put dirty clothes in a plastic hamper in a room separate from your sleeping quarters.
- Throw coats in dryer daily after you return home for the day. 30 minutes on high.
- Keep purses, bags, backpacks, and coats off of the floor, both while in public spaces and other people's home and when you return home.

- Spraying purses, backpacks, bags, etc. with a mixture of 1 part rubbing alcohol and 1 part water will act as a natural repellent to keep insects away from bags. This will prevent a bug from hitching a ride to your home on a purse or backpack. Spraying of clothing is not recommended because of chemical contact with skin.
- Wash sheets at least bi-weekly, weekly is even better.
- Hang things up! Keep clothes, coats, purses, and bags off of the floor
- Vacuum floors and furniture frequently. This keeps any bugs that do hitch a ride home from settling in.
- If you've been somewhere you suspect has bed bugs, throw all exposed clothes, shoes, and bags into the dryer on high for 30 minutes immediately upon returning home (or seal in plastic bags until you can do so).

How Can I Keep Bed Bugs From Spreading If We Have Them?

- Wash and dry clothes and place in sealed plastic bags to prevent reinfestation.
- Before leaving home, put on fresh clothing.
- Put purses, bags, etc. in the dryer to kill bugs, then hang up or seal in plastic bags to keep from becoming reinfested. Bags are bugs favorite way to hitchhike around the community.
- Don't invite guests into areas of your home that are infested.
- If throwing away infested furniture, don't put it where someone else may unknowing pick it up and take it to their home.
- Consult with a professional exterminator, County Health Department, County Extension Agent, or other trained professional for further advice and resources.

Can bed bugs make me sick?

- Bed bugs are not known to transmit disease and the amount of blood loss due to bed bug feeding does not cause problems for the host (the person).
- Scratching of welts can cause skin infections.
- It is best to consult with a physician before treating any rash or skin irritation.
- Antihistamines and corticosteroids may be prescribed to decrease allergic reactions and antibiotic ointment to prevent infection.

How can I get rid of bed bugs? (Be aware: It is extremely difficult to get rid of a bed bug infestation without professional help.)

- Bed bugs are extremely resilient and can survive a year without a blood meal.
- They also hide in tiny places, so inspections and treatments must be very thorough.
- In some cases, infested mattresses, box springs, and furniture must be thrown away.
- Seal and/or caulk all cracks and holes in walls, baseboards, wood, etc. to eliminate hiding places

- Since bed bugs can easily spread throughout a building, it is essential to inspect adjoining rooms and apartments.
- Most effective pesticides can only be obtained through a certified pest control company. **DO-IT-YOURSELF sprays purchased over-the-counter will likely only make the infestation worse over time.** Over-the-counter sprays tend to push bugs into walls and areas that make eventual treatment more difficult. It can also cause them to spread to other rooms in your home. (Read the label, most say they are preventative and won't treat an active infestation).
- **If you can locate the source of the infestation,** a mixture of 1 part rubbing alcohol to 4 parts water sprayed directly on the bugs will kill them. However, it is very difficult to completely kill all of them in this way since direct contact with each bug is required.) Frequent treatment of the site of infestation and other clean-up and sealing of cracks may be able to eliminate the issue.
- It is best to get the help of a professional pest control company. The sooner an infestation is professionally treated, the more affordable it will be to return your home to normal.

For Additional Information and Resources:

<https://www.epa.gov/bedbugs>

<https://extension.unh.edu/resource/dont-let-bed-bugs-bite-fact-sheet>

<https://plunketts.net/blog/good-habits-prevent-bed-bugs>

Zapp Bug Heater: <https://www.zappbug.com/>