

BED BUGS

A FACTSHEET FROM THE CONTRA COSTA BED BUG TASK FORCE

Bed bugs are back and can be found just about anywhere—from homeless shelters to four-star hotel rooms. No one really knows why they have returned, but these little bugs are determined to stick around. Although bed bugs are tiny, they can cause major headaches because they're so difficult to find and hard to get rid of. Use the tips below to help control this stubborn pest.

BIOLOGY

Understanding how bed bugs eat and live can help you get rid of them.

- ◆ Adult bed bugs are flat, small (less than 1/4 inch long), oval-shaped, wingless, and reddish brown. Immature bugs are smaller and amber colored. Eggs are tiny and white.
- ◆ They feed on blood from humans and sometimes other animals. Bed bugs need blood to grow and can live **from 3 to 5 months on a single feeding**.
- ◆ Bed bugs usually bite at night, while we are sleeping.
- ◆ Bed bugs move around by hitching rides on clothing, furniture, bedding, and baggage. Bed bugs will live in any crack or crevice in or around your sleeping areas.

HEALTH ISSUES

- ◆ Bed bugs are not known disease carriers.
- ◆ Bites can cause an allergic reaction with swelling, redness, and itching.
- ◆ Skin infection and scarring can result from scratching.
- ◆ Some people do not react to bed bug bites.
- ◆ Lack of sleep is a serious side-effect causing reduced alertness, loss of productivity, and mood problems.

PREVENTION

Bed bugs are hard to prevent because of their small size, night habits, and ability to hitchhike. Here are some tips to get you started:

- ◆ **Be on the look out** for signs of infestations such as: waking up with bites; seeing live bugs; or dark red or black spots on bedding, carpets, walls and furniture. Finding bed bugs early is the key to preventing their spread.
- ◆ **Paint and caulk around sleeping areas** – such as along baseboards, windows and bed frames – to seal hiding spots.
- ◆ **Inspect used furniture closely** before bringing into your home. Look for signs of infestations in cushions, zippers, seams, and underneath including springs and frames. Use a bright flash light and if possible, a magnifying glass. Beware of items on the curb and in dumpsters.
- ◆ **Take a look around mattresses and furniture when staying in an unfamiliar place.** Bed bugs can hitch a ride home on your clothing or luggage.



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Insecticides alone cannot eliminate a bed bug infestation. Long-term control requires that non-chemical methods be used in combination with insecticides as part of an integrated bed bug management program. Furthermore, control requires the cooperation of the tenant, the landlord, and the pest control professional.

- ◆ **Be persistent!!** Getting rid of bed bugs will require many different steps over several weeks. Be patient and persistent, and you will succeed.
- ◆ **Talk to your neighbors and organize.**
- ◆ **Find out where they are hiding.** Bed bugs aren't just in mattresses (though that is a favorite hiding spot). Look at your bed frame, headboard, and nightstand and along baseboards, under and behind dressers, & any other dark hidden areas nearby. Use a bright flashlight and if possible, a magnifying glass.
- ◆ **Vacuum infested areas carefully.** This will quickly knock down the numbers of live bugs.
- ◆ **Remove the vacuum bag or the vacuum contents,** place into a plastic bag, seal tightly, and dispose right away. Vacuuming alone will not eliminate an infestation.
- ◆ **Steam clean furniture** and other surfaces to kill remaining bugs and hidden eggs. Handheld steamers are widely available in stores and online. The steaming time depends on the steam temperature—the higher the temperature the faster the kill. Pass the steamer slowly over infested surfaces. Use caution to avoid burns.
- ◆ **Put your mattress and box springs into a bed bug proof cover.** These covers resist tearing and have a tight locking zipper that keeps bed bugs from escaping. It also makes the mattress easier to inspect. Leave covers on for at least one year and pull bed away from the wall. Keep bedding from touching the floor and change sheets often until the problem is eliminated.
- ◆ **Wash all bed linens, laundry, and other infested articles in hot water.** Dry on the highest possible setting. Anything that is unwashed, unwashable, or “dry clean only” and is dry, can be put in the drier for at least 30 minutes to kill bed bugs.
- ◆ **Talk to your pest control professional before throwing anything out.** You may not have to throw away furniture, including mattresses. Most items can be treated.
- ◆ **Mark or label any items that you are throwing out** to prevent others from accidentally bringing bed bugs home. Infested items left in common areas such as laundry rooms, basements, alleys, and curbs may spread the problem to others in your apartment building or community.
- ◆ **Do not use chemicals on or around sleeping areas** and furniture. Pesticides currently available to consumers are ineffective.
- ◆ If you are renting, **notify your landlord about any sign of bed bugs immediately.** You have the right to live in safe and decent housing. Work with your landlord to get problems corrected quickly and prevent the spread of bed bugs to your friends and neighbors.
- ◆ If you are having trouble getting assistance from your landlord and you live in
Concord:
Call Bay Area Legal Aid: 925-219-3325
Walnut Creek:
Call EcoHousing at 925-246-2069
Other areas of Contra Costa County:
Call Pacific Community Services at 925- 439-1056

Remember, there is **no magic formula** that will guarantee bed bug elimination. These tips are not intended to replace a treatment program by knowledgeable professionals. The use of pesticides may be necessary. If possible, seek professional advice before applying pesticides for bed bugs especially around children, pets, and people with health conditions.