

## **C**ontrol of Bed Bugs

Control of bed bugs can be difficult. If the infestation has just begun and only a few bugs can be found, it may be possible to control the problem with products used for cockroach control.

An older infestation having many bugs needs to be handled by a pest control company with experience in this type of problem. Rooms with infestations need to be cleaned in order to eliminate any clutter where bed bugs might hide. Bed linens and clothing should be washed in hot water or dry-cleaned. Mattresses may need to be discarded or heat-sanitized by a licensed mattress sanitizer. The pest control company will want to treat the rooms with an insecticide that will kill any hidden bed bugs.

When traveling you can look for bed bugs by lifting the mattress and checking the top of the box springs for any bugs or signs of bugs, especially the dark spots left from digested blood. If possible, also look behind the headboard. Bed bugs in hotels and motels should be reported to the local health department.



## **S**leep Tight...Don't Let the Bed Bugs Bite

Sleeping "tight" is an old English expression for sleeping soundly or restfully. This phrase might also refer to old style beds that used rope to support the mattress.

Keeping the ropes "tight" would make sleeping more comfortable. "Chinch" or "chinchies" was a common old Southern name for a bed bug, but the true chinch bug lives in lawns and feeds on plants.



# Bed Bugs

**NEED MORE INFORMATION?**  
Contact your local health department or the Public Health Pest Management Section at (919) 733-6407



N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources  
Division of Environmental Health  
Public Health Pest Management Section  
<http://www.deh.enr.state.nc.us/phpm/index.htm>

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# Some Facts

From the times of the caveman to the present, bed bugs have lived with people. For many years bed bugs were an uncommon problem in the United States, but they are again being found in homes, hotels and motels.

## **B**ed Bug Life Cycle

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Bed bugs are small wingless insects. The adults are about a quarter of an inch long, an eighth of an inch wide and dark brown in color. Bed bugs are oval shaped and flat when unfed. The female may lay one to five small white eggs a day and as many as 500 in a lifetime. Indoors, where it is warm, bed bugs may breed year-round.

The young bed bugs that hatch from the eggs are called nymphs. Nymphs look just like the adults but are much smaller and lighter in color. Under ideal conditions, it takes about a month to grow from the egg to adult stage.

The nymphs and adult bed bugs both feed on blood usually taken from a person while they're sleeping at night. The bed bug draws blood from a long snout, similar to that of a mosquito. Bed bugs are very hardy and can survive many months without food.

Bed bugs will hide in any tight location. The bed is the most preferred site, but as the number of bugs increases they will spread to other places in the room and then to other rooms. Bed bugs commonly hide in the crack between the mattress and box spring. They will also hide under labels, trim or buttons. Cracks or openings on the bed frame are also preferred hiding spots.

Hollow metal tubing on frames provide an excellent hiding place for bed bugs. Bed bugs will hide in nightstands, behind pictures, along the baseboards and under carpets. Sofas and stuffed chairs may also become infested.

After finding a blood meal, bugs will return to their hiding places. As they digest the blood, they will leave small dark spots on the mattress or box springs. These bugs do not generally live on people or in clothing.

Bed bugs may be carried in luggage from one hotel to another or to a home. Used furniture or mattresses may also contain bed bugs. In North Carolina, used mattresses cannot be sold by a store unless they have been heat sanitized. A used mattress that has been heat-sanitized will have a yellow label that indicates it has been properly treated.

The human bed bug, *Cimex lectularius*, is the most common cause of bug problems, but similar-looking types of bugs that feed on bats and birds may sometimes be found in homes.

Bugs need to be identified to determine if bats or birds living in the building may have been the source of the bugs.

The increasing problem caused by bed bugs may be because insecticides are being used less, and those that are used are not long-lasting.

## **B**ed Bug Bites and Disease

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Bed bug bites are usually found on areas of the skin that are not covered by bed clothing. Bed bugs prefer to feed on people, but other animals such as cats, dogs and birds may also be fed upon. Usually the bite is painless while the bed bug is feeding and a sleeping person may be unaware that the bugs are biting.

While the bug is feeding it may move and take several bites in an almost straight line. After the bug has fed, the bites will begin to itch. Scratching the bites may cause secondary infections. People with large numbers of bed bug bites may experience discomfort or flu-like symptoms caused by a reaction to the saliva injected by the feeding bugs. In the United States, bed bugs are not known to transmit any diseases.