



Bed bugs

(*Cimex lectularius*)

What are bed bugs?

Bed bugs are small, parasitic insects that feed on the blood of humans and animals while they sleep. Adult bed bugs are about ¼ inch in length. They are oval in shape, but are flattened from top to bottom. Bed bugs can be off-white to light tan, deep brown or burnt orange in color. The host's dark blood may be apparent in the body of the bug. Bed bugs cannot fly.

Who is at risk for bedbugs?

Bed bugs can be found worldwide and have been reported more frequently in recent years. They most often are found in rooms where people sleep, and they generally reside on or near beds or other furniture used for sleeping. Bed bugs are typically inactive during the day.

What symptoms do bed bugs cause?

Bed bugs are not known to transmit any infectious diseases. Bed bugs generally bite during the night while hosts are asleep. While feeding, the bugs inject their saliva, which contains an anesthetic and an anticoagulant, into the skin, so their bites are painless. The sore caused by a bite looks similar to a mosquito bite and usually itches. Bites can occur on the face, necks, arms, hands or any other body part. After a prolonged period of time, the bites may cause the host to have a mild to intense allergic reaction. Scratching the sores may lead to a secondary bacterial infection.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Bite marks may take as long as 14 days to develop in some people.

How do bed bugs spread?

Bed bugs hide in small crevices, and may invade luggage, furniture, clothing, pillows, boxes and other objects. They are spread when these are moved between apartments, homes and hotels. Used furniture (i.e., bed frames, mattresses, etc.) are at the greatest risk of storing bed bugs and their eggs. Bed bugs can also pass between adjoining apartments through holes in walls.

When and for how long is a person able to spread bed bugs?

Bed bugs are not spread person-to-person. Bed bugs can survive for months without feeding, so they may be present in apparently vacant and clean apartments, hotels or other types of residences. Bed bugs are able to spread as long as a host is living with them.

How are bed bugs diagnosed?

Many different types of insects resemble bed bugs. Samples of bugs should be collected and submitted to an entomologist for evaluation. Bed bugs should be suspected by physicians if residents complain of bites that occurred while they were sleeping.

What is the treatment for bed bug sores?

Bed bug sores usually do not pose a serious medical threat. Sores may be treated with antihistamines and corticosteroids to reduce allergic reactions and inflammation.

Do past bed bug lesions make a person immune?

No. There is no immunity to bed bug lesions. They are similar to mosquito bites and can reoccur.

Should children or others be excluded from child care, school, work or other activities if they have bed bug lesions?

No. People do not need to be excluded for having bed bug lesions.

What can be done to prevent the spread of bed bugs?

The best way to avoid a bed bug infestation is to avoid bringing bed bugs home. Used furniture should be carefully inspected, and used clothing should be washed immediately. Avoid placing luggage or personal items on the bed at hotels, and inspect luggage and personal items for bed bugs when traveling.

Management of bed bugs requires cleaning, room modifications and possibly insecticidal treatments to the residence. Clutter should be reduced at the residence. Infested rooms should be thoroughly cleaned. Infested surfaces should be scrubbed with a stiff brush to dislodge eggs. Vacuuming should be done to remove bed bugs from cracks and crevices. All possible hiding spots should be inspected. Mattress bags can be used to trap bed bugs so they eventually die. Holes or cracks in walls should be sealed. A pest control operator should be consulted regarding the situation. If you are a tenant, the property manager should be contacted.

Additional Information:

Additional information is available at www.ndhealth.gov/disease or by calling the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180.

Resource:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/parasites/bedbugs/.