

# Bed bugs

## Bed bugs are back

Bed bug populations dropped dramatically during the mid-1900s. Now Oregon, along with many other states and most countries, is seeing them reappear.

- Since the 1940s, bed bugs have developed resistance to pesticides that were once used to control them.
- For the last several decades, there has not been a focus on the science or real life experience of dealing with bed bugs.
- People travel more often now, and to farther destinations. Bed bugs find our sleeping areas by hitchhiking on our luggage, clothing and other belongings.

## Public health significance

- Bed bugs feed on the blood of humans. They are not known to spread disease.
- Effects from bed bug bites can range from no mark at all to a red, swollen, itchy and irritated bite mark. In rare cases bites may lead to bacterial infections from scratching the bitten area. In extremely rare cases, people who are very allergic to the bites can experience inflammation or infection of the lymph nodes and anaphylaxis.
- Bed bugs and their bites can create stress for people living in infested homes. People report anxiety, insomnia and feelings of bugs crawling all over them. People also report feeling ashamed, even though bed bugs are not at all related to personal flaws or social class.
- Seniors and people living with conditions that limit their physical abilities might find the physical demands of dealing with bed bugs to be too much to handle on their own (e.g., inspection, monitoring and preparing their homes for treatment).
- Once bed bugs are established, controlling them is complicated and often expensive. Treatment of the problem may seem overwhelming and can create financial hardship.



## Preventing bed bugs

- Vacuum and clean regularly with soap and water. Eliminate clutter. While cleaning, look for bed bugs, eggs, rusty-colored spots and the outer skeletons that bed bugs shed when they molt (see photo to the right).
- Do a visual inspection of your sleeping area. With a flashlight check the mattress, box spring, bed frame and bedding. Pull back the sheets and mattress pad cover and check for bed bugs on the folds and seams.
- Check cracks and crevices in furniture, floorboards, baseboards, windows, door frames, light switch plates and electrical outlets. Remove drawers and check inside, on top and bottom, at hinges, in holes and even on the tops of screws. Use caulk to seal areas where possible or appropriate.
- Check all used furniture before bringing it into your home. Avoid discarded mattresses and furniture.
- When traveling, do not set luggage on or near the bed; instead use the hallway or bathtub and inspect your suitcase before you leave. Ask lodging staff about their bed bug history, prevention and control policies.
- If you think you were in an area with bed bugs, wash and dry clothing on the hottest setting as soon as you get home. High heat for at least 20 minutes will kill adults and eggs. If you can't launder clothes right when you get home, store them in a sealed plastic bag until you can.



## I have bed bugs! What should I do?

Don't panic. Bed bugs are difficult to get rid of but not impossible. There is no need to feel ashamed or embarrassed because anyone can get bed bugs. It is important to alert others who are or recently have been in your home, as well as property owners or managers if you live in a multi-unit setting such as an apartment, dorm, residential care facility or shelter. Follow the steps below if you think you have a problem.

1. Make sure you really have bed bugs, not fleas, carpet beetles or ticks. Trap a bug and contact your local Oregon State University county extension office for help (see website on page 4). Visual guides available online also help to identify bed bugs. Check the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and National Pesticide Information Center links on page 4.
2. Follow the tips in the "Preventing bed bugs" section above to know where to start looking for bed bugs. Vacuum and clean to reduce the number of bugs you have. Change the vacuum bag after each use. Put the used bag in a sealed plastic bag before putting it in the trash so the bugs can't crawl out and re-infest the area.
3. Frequently wash and dry bedding on the hottest setting. Remember to also wash the laundry container.

4. Pull beds away from the walls and keep bedding from touching the floor. Bed bugs can crawl from the walls and floor to your bed. Sticky traps and special cups prevent bed bugs from climbing up the bed posts to the box spring and mattress.
5. Put box springs and mattresses in covers that are specially designed to keep bed bugs out.
6. Consider hiring a licensed, responsible pest management professional with a history of using integrated pest management (IPM) to deal with bed bugs. The Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) regulates pest control companies. Check the ODA website (on page 4) to find licenced pest control companies and to find out if a pest control company has a history of violations.



## Pesticide precautions

- It is not safe to spray your body with insect repellents (like DEET) before you go to sleep. Insect repellents are not meant to be trapped on your skin for long periods of time. Call the Poison Center, 1-800-222-1222, immediately if you think you are experiencing health effects from doing this.
- When considering a pesticide for use in bedrooms and sleeping areas ensure it is labeled for indoor use. Using pesticides labeled for outdoor use puts people and pets in your home at risk for health problems.
- Using pesticides that do not list bed bugs as a pest on the label could create a bigger problem by making bed bugs resistant to chemicals and harder to control, or by forcing them to hide in even harder to reach places. Use the U.S. EPA bed bug pesticide database on page 4 to search for products registered for bed bugs.
- Look for the EPA registration number. This will tell you that the product is legal and that the U.S. EPA reviewed it for safety and effectiveness.
- Avoid bug bombs or foggers. This method is not effective at reaching the cracks and crevices and hidden spaces where bed bugs hide.
- Use treatments that directly target areas where bed bugs have been seen, or would commonly be found. Advise people and pets to stay out of treated rooms until it is safe to re-enter. If you have to wait before re-entering the room, the label will tell you how long to wait.
- Contact the National Pesticide Information Center (NPIC) at 1-800-858-7378 to discuss precautions specific to your product, or other concerns you may have about using pesticides.

## Where can I get more information?

### **Oregon Public Health Division**

[www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/pesticide/](http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/pesticide/) **and**

<http://egov.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/pl/>

### **Community Alliance of Tenants**

<http://oregoncat.org/community/alliance-of/tenants/C8/>

### **National Center for Healthy Housing**

[www.nchh.org/Portals/0/Contents/bedbug\\_report.pdf](http://www.nchh.org/Portals/0/Contents/bedbug_report.pdf)

### **National Pesticide Information Center**

<http://npic.orst.edu/pest/bedbug.html>

### **New York City Bed Bugs Report**

[http://council.nyc.gov/downloads/pdf/bed\\_bugs\\_report\\_2010.pdf](http://council.nyc.gov/downloads/pdf/bed_bugs_report_2010.pdf)

### **Oregon Department of Agriculture**

<http://oda.state.or.us/dbs/search.lasso#pesticide>

### **Oregon State University County Extension Office**

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/locations.php>

### **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**

[www.epa.gov/pesticides/bedbugs/index.html](http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/bedbugs/index.html)



PUBLIC HEALTH DIVISION

Office of Environmental Public Health

Phone: 971-673-0977

[pesticides.health@state.or.us](mailto:pesticides.health@state.or.us)

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