

# BED BUGS FACT SHEET

## What are bed bugs?

Bed bugs are small, flat, wingless insects that feed on the blood of people or animals while they sleep. Bed bugs are reddish-brown in color and range from 1mm to 7mm in size (roughly the size of Lincoln's head on a penny). Bed bugs can live several months without feeding on blood. Bed bugs are not known to spread disease.

## Who can get bed bugs?

Anyone. However, people who travel frequently and share living and sleeping quarters where other people have previously slept have a higher risk of being bitten and or spreading a bed bug infestation. Bed bugs are found all over the world and their presence is not determined by how clean an environment is kept.

## What are the signs of a bed bug infestation?

The signs of a bed bug infestation include the following:

- Presence of the exoskeletons (outer skeleton) shed by the bed bugs
- Bed bugs in the fold of mattresses and sheets
- Rusty-colored blood spots
- A sweet musty odor

Bed bug infestations usually occur around or near the areas where people sleep. These areas include apartments, shelters, rooming houses, hotels, cruise ships, buses, trains, and dorm rooms. They hide during the day in places such as seams of mattresses, box springs, bed frames, headboards, dresser tables, inside cracks or crevices, behind wallpaper, or any other clutter or objects around a bed.

## What are the symptoms of bed bug bites?

Symptoms of bed bug bites include the following:

- A slightly swollen reddish area that may itch and be irritating
  - The bite marks can be random or in a straight line on the face, neck, arms, hands and any other skin areas exposed during sleep
- Insomnia
- Anxiety
- Skin irritation as a result of scratching the bites

Most people do not realize they have been bitten until bite marks appear anywhere from 1–14 days after the initial bite. A bed bug bite affects each person differently. Some people will have no reaction to bed bug bites and will not develop bite marks or other visible signs. Other people may be allergic to the bed bugs and have symptoms such as enlarged bite marks, painful swellings at the bite site and on rare occasions a serious allergic reaction.

## How are bed bugs spread?

Bed bugs are usually spread from place to place as people travel. The bed bugs travel in the seams and folds of luggage, overnight bags, folded clothes, bedding, furniture and anywhere else where they can hide. Most people do not realize they are transporting bed bugs as they travel.

## How are bed bugs treated?

Bed bug bites usually do not pose a serious medical threat. The best way to treat a bite is to avoid scratching the area and apply antiseptic creams or lotions and take an antihistamine.

## What should you do if you have a bed bug infestation?

Bed bug infestations are commonly treated by insecticide spraying. If you suspect that you have an infestation, contact your landlord or professional pest control company that is experienced with treating bed bugs. The best way to prevent bed bugs is regular inspection for the signs of an infestation.

## Should a person with bed bugs bite stay home from school/daycare?

A child with bed bug bites can remain in school. Parents should be advised and educated on effective management of bed bugs.

## Where can I get more information?

Information about bed bugs and other related health topics can be found at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov). The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please visit [www.doh.dc.gov](http://www.doh.dc.gov) or call (202) 442-9371.