

Bed Bug Identification and Biology by Erin Harlow

Identification

- Bed bugs have six legs, unlike a tick which has eight legs.
- They have no wings which means they cannot fly nor can they jump like a flea.
- They have a long mouthpart to “suck” blood
- Adult bed bugs are dark red, while newly hatched bed bugs are tan in color until they feed (see photo below).
- They are ectoparasites which means they only feed on blood and they prefer humans, although, will feed on other animals.



Bed bugs are thin and flat.

- Their bodies are covered with golden hairs and are very flat. This makes it very easy for them to hide in tight spaces, which they prefer.
- If an infestation is bad enough, you may notice a musty-sweet smell. Bed bugs are related to stink bugs and have a similar smell.



Nymph

Life Cycle

- Bed bugs lay about three eggs per day.
- Eggs are clear and stick to surfaces.
- Bed bugs must molt or shed their skin five times before they become adults.
- If bed bugs have access to regular feedings then it takes them four-nine weeks to become adults.

Feeding

- Bed bugs can live up to one year without a blood meal.
- They normally feed for about ten minutes at a time, once a week. Once they are done feeding they will go find a place to hide until their next meal.
- They are attracted to people by their CO₂ and body heat.
- Bed bugs normally feed at night, but they will feed during the day.



Adult female bed bug feeding.

Photo: G. D. Alpert

Bites

- Bed bugs do not transmit diseases. Secondary infections can occur when people scratch their bites.
- Not everyone reacts to bites. If you have not been bitten before then it may take ten days or longer for symptoms to appear if they ever do. If you have been bitten before then they may appear immediately.
- If you are sleeping you probably won't notice you are being bitten. Most people don't feel anything.
- Bites normally appear in rows because the bed bugs prefer to stay on the sheets while they feed on you.



Reaction to bites after 3 days.

Why are They such a Problem?

- Bed bugs are a nuisance.
- They can cause people to have sleepless nights.
- They can cause inflamed, itchy skin lesions.
- They stain sheets and mattresses.
- They cause psychological stress, such as delusory parasitosis. Delusory parasitosis is a condition when people believe they have bugs crawling on them or biting them and they think that no one else believes they exist except themselves.



Where to Find Them?

- Bed bugs can be found almost anywhere in a house or building, especially where people frequent.
- Adult bed bugs can crawl about 4 ft/minute, so even if they are living on your dresser across the room, they can easily get to you during the night.
- Bed bugs do not discriminate between economic status or race. They can be found on buses, airplanes, in movie theatres, homes, senior centers, and schools.
- Do not pick-up discarded furniture that is left by the side of the road and remember to thoroughly inspect secondhand items from garage sales, stores, and websites.



Bed bug blood spot and fecal smears.

For more information on bed bugs, visit the University of Florida's Bed Bug Pest Management website at http://ipm.ifas.ufl.edu/community/structural/bed_bug_IPM.shtml or the Jacksonville Bed Bug Task Force's website at http://duval.ifas.ufl.edu/Bed_Bugs.shtml.

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