

# PRINCETON REGIONAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BED BUGS

### WHERE DO BED BUGS COME FROM?

Bed bug infestations were once a common public health problem worldwide that declined in incidence due to the use of the pesticide DDT. In the 1970's the use of DDT dropped off sharply because of health and environmental concerns. Since the mid 1990's bed bug infestations worldwide have been on the rise again because we no longer use strong pesticides like DDT and there has been a large increase in the number of world travelers.

Bed bugs are great travelers and since they are so small they are readily transported via luggage, purses, backpacks, clothing, bedding and upholstered furniture.

### WHAT ARE BED BUGS?

Bed bugs are small insects that feed on the blood of mammals and birds. Adult bed bugs are oval, flattened (nearly as flat as a sheet of paper), straw-colored to reddish-brown wingless insects. The young are about the size of poppy seeds and adults the size of apple seeds. After feeding they look like a different insect - larger, more cigar shaped, and dark red. They are visible to the naked eye, but often hide in cracks and crevices. When bed bugs feed, their bodies swell and become a brighter red. In homes, bed bugs feed mostly on the blood of humans, usually at night when people are sleeping.

### ARE BED BUG BITES DANGEROUS?

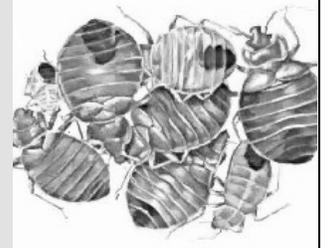
Although bed bugs and their bites can be scary to get, they are not known to spread disease. Bed bug bites are initially painless, but later can turn into very itchy skin welts.

### HOW DOES A HOME BECOME INFESTED WITH BED BUGS?

In most cases people carry bed bugs into their homes without knowing it, in infested luggage, upholstered furniture, bedding, or clothing. Bed bugs can also travel between apartments through small cracks in walls and floors.

### HOW CAN I TELL IF MY HOME IS INFESTED?

Look for small blood-stains, dark spots from their droppings or the bed bugs themselves. If you have been bitten you may have itchy skin welts



### HOW CAN I KEEP BED BUGS OUT OF MY HOUSE?

1. Wash clothing and inspect luggage immediately after returning from a trip.
2. Inspect furniture (especially used) for bed bugs before bringing it into your home.
3. Never bring discarded bed frames, mattresses, box springs, or upholstered furniture into your home.

### HOW CAN I GET RID OF BED BUGS?

The best way to get rid of bed bugs is to clean, disinfect, eliminate their hiding places and remove contaminated materials.

First, find out where bed bugs are hiding:

- ✓ Use a bright flashlight to look for bed bugs or their dark droppings in furniture, mattresses, bedding, linens, curtains, rugs & carpets and clothes.
- ✓ Use a hot hair dryer, a thin knife or an old playing card to force them out of hiding spaces.
- ✓ Check behind your headboard, in the seams and tufts of your mattress and inside the box springs, along bedroom baseboard cracks, in and around nightstands and check any cracks in the wall.

Then clean, disinfect and eliminate the bed bugs:

- ✓ Wash cloth items with soap in hot water and dry them on the highest dryer setting.
- ✓ Plush toys, shoes and many other items can be placed in a hot dryer for 30 minutes.
- ✓ Scrub mattress seams and tufts with a stiff brush to dislodge bed bugs and their eggs.
- ✓ Vacuum mattress, box spring, bed frame, nearby furniture, floors, floor cracks and carpets.

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BED BUGS continued, page two



- ✓ Immediately after vacuuming, put the vacuum cleaner bag in a sealed plastic bag, and dispose of it in an outdoor container.
- ✓ If you find bed bugs in your mattress or box springs, first clean and vacuum and then cover (encapsulate) each with plastic or vinyl, waterproof, zippered covers labeled “allergen rated, or “for dust mites.” Seal the zippers with duct tape and keep the covers on for at least one year.
- ✓ Wash the whole area and all items with soap and a disinfectant (½ cup of bleach to a gallon of water).
- ✓ Dispose of infested items that cannot be cleaned and get rid of clutter. Seal tightly in a plastic bag and discard in an outside container.

Bed bugs can live for several months up to a year without feeding so in addition to the cleaning it may be necessary to use a pesticide.

The Health Department recommends that homeowners that choose to use a pesticide hire pest control companies that are registered with the NJ State Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) and have a Commercial Pesticide Applicators license. Ask to see their license or check directly with NJDEP by calling 609-530-4070.

Be very careful about using pesticides yourself. Pesticides can be hazardous to people and pets. If you choose to apply a pesticide yourself or you hire a licensed pest control professional follow these health & safety precautions:

- ✓ Only use pesticides clearly labeled for bed bug extermination. Never use a cockroach spray, ant spray, or any other pesticide that does not list bed bugs on the label.

- ✓ Follow instructions and warnings on product label.
- ✓ Wear protective gloves and make sure the area where you are applying the pesticide is ventilated. Open a window and put a fan facing out to ventilate a room.
- ✓ Never spray pesticides on top of mattresses or sofas or in areas where children or pets are present or where you prepare food.
- ✓ Treat mattresses and sofas by applying small amounts of pesticide on seams only. Pesticides should never be sprayed on top of mattresses or sofas.
- ✓ Never purchase or use a product without a manufacturer’s label and never buy pesticides from street vendors.
- ✓ Avoid using “insecticide bombs” and “foggers” in your home. These products spread hazardous chemicals throughout your home, and are not likely to be effective against bed bugs.
- ✓ Clean up areas where the pesticide was used by washing with soap and water, rinse.
- ✓ When you are done remove your gloves and wash your hands with soap and water. Don’t use a hand sanitizer to clean your hands, it will kill germs but it cannot remove pesticide residue.

### HOW CAN I KEEP MY FURNITURE FROM INFESTING SOMEONE ELSE’S HOME?

- ✓ Never resell or donate infested furniture or clothing.
- ✓ If you throw infested furniture away, make it is undesirable to others by cutting or poking holes in the upholstery or making it unusable. Tape a sign to it that says, “Infested with Bed Bugs.”

**Princeton Regional Health Department**  
One Monument Drive  
Princeton, New Jersey 08540  
609-497-7608  
[www.Princetontwp.org](http://www.Princetontwp.org)