What Are Bed Bugs?
Bed bugs are small, wingless insects that feed on the blood of humans and other warm-blooded animals. Bed bugs are not known to transmit human disease. Hatching bed bugs are the size of a poppy seed and cream colored. Adult bed bugs have brown, oval-shaped bodies that are about the size of an apple seed. Prior to feeding, they are as flat as a credit card. While feeding, they become dark red and bloated. Bed bugs are mainly active at night and often live in and near beds and other areas where people sleep or are sedentary. Bed bugs can live up to a year or more. In one year, a female bed bug can lay hundreds of eggs.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who is at risk for getting bed bugs?
Bed bugs may be found wherever people reside or visit, including hotels, train stations, theaters, and cruise ships. They can be brought into homes in luggage, on clothing, or in used furniture, or may spread from an adjacent apartment.

Do bed bugs cause harm or spread disease?
Bed bugs are not known to transmit human disease. But their bites can become irritated and infected when scratched.

How can I tell if I’ve been bitten by a bed bug?
The bite of a bed bug is similar to that caused by a mosquito or flea. The bites tend to occur on exposed skin areas, such as arms, shoulders, neck and face, during sleeping, and may cause itchy swellings that appear from one hour to several days after a person is bitten. Some people do not react to bed bug bites.

What is the treatment for bed bug bites?
It is important to resist the urge to scratch because this may intensify the irritation and itching, and could lead to infection. Applying an icepack may relieve swelling. Doctors often treat patients with antihistamines and corticosteroids to reduce allergic reactions and inflammation, and may recommend lotions or creams to reduce itching. If you think your bites are infected, visit a health care provider.

How can I check my house for bed bugs?
Bed bugs are tough to identify because of their small size and because they are usually active during the early morning hours. In your house, look for:
- Live bugs
- Accumulations of small black stains (dried blood)
- Shed skins (these look like hollow bed bugs, amber-colored)
- Tiny white eggs
You may see bugs, stains, or eggs on mattress seams, around buttons and handles, inside box springs, on bed frames and other nearby furniture, along edges of carpet, and under electrical outlet plates. In larger infestations, there may be a noticeable odor.

Do I need to throw away all my furniture?
Most furniture infested by bed bugs can be cleaned or treated, and reused. The pesticide control operator (PCO) who inspects and treats for bed bugs can provide advice on whether to keep infested furniture. Mattresses and box springs may be kept in bed-bug-proof covers until the bugs die (up to a year).
Frequently Asked Questions (continued)

Can I get bed bugs from used furniture?
Yes. Infested furniture is a common way to transfer bed bugs to your home. Be very careful to avoid bringing furniture into your home without knowing its history. In some cases, new mattresses have become infested with bed bugs from used mattresses in the same delivery truck. To avoid spreading bed bugs, it is advisable to seal unsalvageable items in plastic and to mark them with a warning, or damage them so they won’t be scavenged.

Whose responsibility is it to eliminate an infestation – the tenant’s or the landlord’s?
Under the Massachusetts Sanitary Code, landlords are responsible for the elimination of all pests (including bed bugs) in residential buildings. However, the cooperation of tenants is needed to ensure that an infestation is resolved in an effective and timely manner. The landlord should be notified quickly when a tenant suspects or discovers a bed bug problem. In turn, a landlord should respond immediately, by ensuring that a qualified pest control operator inspects the unit (and all nearby units) and, if necessary, treats all infested units in the building.

What can I do if I have bed bugs in my home?
It is important to act quickly, even if you only suspect an infestation. Using consumer pesticide products (sprays, foggers, or “bombs”) is NOT recommended because they may harm occupants and probably won’t work. A qualified, professional PCO should be hired to solve a bed bug problem. Report your concern to your landlord. Capture a bug and put it in a lidded glass jar to show your landlord or PCO. The PCO who treats your home will give you detailed instructions on how to prepare your home so that the treatments are effective. Most infestations require up to three treatments, approximately two weeks apart.

To report an infestation or request an inspection for bed bugs in Cambridge, you may contact the Inspectional Services Department at 617-349-6100. For information about bed bugs, you may contact the Cambridge Public Health Department (Environmental Health Division) at 617-665-3848.

Sources: Boston Public Health Commission, New York City Dept. of Health and Mental Hygiene, Cornell University, Harvard University School of Public Health, and Harvard University Health & Safety Department.

For local information about bed bugs: Contact the Cambridge Public Health Department’s Environmental Health Division at 617-665-3848 or visit www.cambridgepublichealth.org.