Preventing and Getting Rid of Bed Bugs Safely

A Guide for Cambridge Property Owners, Managers and Tenants

A COLLABORATION OF THE CAMBRIDGE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS
CAMBRIDGE INSPECTIONAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT
AND CAMBRIDGE PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT
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Using This Guide

Bed bug infestations are increasingly common in the United States. There are steps that can be taken to prevent bed bugs from infesting your home. When bed bugs are present, they can be safely controlled.

This guide will help you:
1. Learn more about bed bugs and how they thrive.
2. Prevent bed bugs from infesting your home.
3. Safely rid your home of bed bugs if they do occur.
4. Select and work with a pest control professional.

Recognizing a Bed Bug

From its appearance
Bed bugs are small insects that feed mainly on human blood. A newly hatched bed bug is semi-transparent, light tan in color, and the size of a poppy seed. Adult bed bugs are flat, have rusty-red-colored oval bodies, and are about the size of an apple seed.

Bed bugs can be easily confused with other small household insects, including carpet beetles, spider beetles and newly hatched cockroaches (nymphs).

From its waste
Blood stains, droppings and egg shells are often found in the following locations:
• Mattress seams and tufts, bed linen, pillow cases, box springs, bed frames, and other upholstered furniture.
• Crevices and cracks in walls and floors and under carpet edges.
• Baseboards of walls.
From its bite

Some people do not react to bed bug bites. But for those who do, bite marks may appear within minutes or days, usually where skin is exposed during sleep. They can be small bumps or large welts and often itch. The welts normally go away after a few days. Because the bites may resemble mosquito and other insect bites, a bump or welt alone does not prove there are bed bugs.

How Bed Bugs Grow and Reproduce

Bed bugs are most active when we sleep. They crawl onto exposed skin, inject a mild anesthetic and suck up a small amount of blood. Most people never feel the actual bite.

Bed bugs need a blood meal to grow and lay eggs. On average, a female lays 5 eggs per day and the eggs take 4 to 12 days to hatch. Bed bugs are fully grown in about 6 to 12 months. (The above time limits will vary based on temperature.)
Health Effects of Bed Bugs

Although bed bugs and their bites are a nuisance, they are not known to spread disease.

- Bed bug bites can be very itchy and irritating. Most welts heal in a few days but in unusual cases, the welt may persist for several weeks. Scratching the bites may cause them to become infected. Usually an anti-itching ointment will help, but if bites become infected, people should see their doctor.

- The anxiety about being bitten can lead to sleeplessness, which can affect well-being. Properly and effectively responding to bed bugs helps to keep anxiety low.

Some people become so desperate that they use inappropriate, illegal or excessive amounts of pesticides that can lead to poisonings. This guide provides advice on how to get rid of bed bugs safely.

Preventing Bed Bugs from Infesting Your Home

Bed bugs can enter homes by hiding in used furniture, luggage and clothing, and by traveling to other units through structural gaps, openings and along connecting pipes and wiring.

- Never bring home bed frames, mattresses, box springs or upholstered furniture found on the street.

- Only accept used furniture from trusted sources. If you are unsure if the furniture is free of bed bugs, check it carefully before bringing it home.

- When traveling, inspect the bed and furniture. Keep suitcases closed and off the floor and bed. Inspect all your possessions before you leave.

- If you suspect you have been around bed bugs, immediately wash and dry your clothing on hot settings or store items in a sealed plastic bag until they can be washed.

- Sealing cracks and crevices with caulk will help prevent bed bugs from entering your home.
Inspecting for Bed Bugs

Look for bed bugs, blood stains, dark droppings, tiny white eggs, and shed skins (a flashlight and a magnifying glass will help). Start by looking where you sleep or sit. Then search nearby areas and continue up to 25 feet away (the farthest distance a bed bug usually travels.) Keep a written record of every room and location where you find signs of bed bugs. Share this record with a pest control professional.

Inspect mattresses, box springs, bed frames and bedding
- Check all seams, tufts, pillow tops, handles, and any rips in the material.
- Look inside the box spring cavity.
- Look at both sides of the headboards, and all components of the bed frame.

Carefully inspect cracks and crevices in bedroom furniture, floor boards and baseboards, windows and door frames
- Use a flash light to inspect cracks and crevices of furniture, windows and door frames.
- Swipe a putty knife, or plastic card into cracks and crevices to force bed bugs out. A hot blow-dryer on a low setting will also work.
- If live bugs do come out, crush them with tissue or paper towels and flush down the toilet or securely dispose outside the building.
- Remove drawers from furniture and check all surfaces, joints, crevices and even screw holes.
Remove furniture cushions and check their zippers, seams and tufts. Then check their frames.

- **Check walls and wall hangings**
  - Using crevice tools, check paintings, posters, pictures and mirrors.
  - Check cracks in plaster and peeling wallpaper.
  - Inspect the surfaces around electrical outlet and light switch cover plates.

**CAUTION: Electrical hazard!**
Do not expose, touch, or insert anything into these electrical components!
Unplug then check appliances (phones, clocks, smoke detectors) and other items.
**Tips for Getting Rid of Bed Bugs**

- Don’t feel ashamed – anyone can get bed bugs.
- Notify your landlord and neighbors immediately.
- It is the landlord’s responsibility to eliminate bedbugs quickly.
- Professional pest management companies are usually required to control bed bugs.
- Complaints should be directed to the Cambridge Inspectional Services Department (617) 349-6100.

**There are two main treatment methods**

- Heat treatment is quicker and initially more effective, but is also more expensive.
- Pesticide treatment is more common, slower, and less expensive.

**What to expect with pesticide treatments**

- At least two inspection+treatment visits plus a third inspection-only visit.
- Complex infestations often require more treatments / visits.
- Tenants must prepare their units for treatment as specified by the company.

**A good pest management company will...**

- Be licensed and certified in Massachusetts.
- Inform you about the infestation and how to prepare for treatment of bed bugs.
- Use bed bug traps to monitor the effectiveness of their treatments.
- Provide product labels and safety data for the pesticides they use, when asked.
- Perform a thorough inspection before any treatment is performed.
- Perform pesticide treatments every 2 weeks until the bugs are gone.
- Provide you with a written inspection report(s).

**To find a good professional**

- Ask friends, neighbors, and business associates.
- Search the internet or directories for licensed and certified companies.
- Interview several companies and compare methods, training, experience and costs.
- Do they follow the recommendations in this guide?
- Call the Massachusetts Pesticide Bureau (617) 626-1776 to check licensing and complaints.
Bed bug infestations usually require the use of pesticides. Only professionals should apply pesticides that are registered by the Environmental Protection Agency for use on bed bugs. Pesticide foggers and bug bombs are not effective against bed bugs and can harm people and pets.

Ask the professional to:

• Use the least-toxic pesticide labeled for bed bugs that will be effective.
• Follow all instructions and warnings on product labels.
• Tell you when it’s safe to re-enter a treated room.
• Never spray the top of mattresses or sofas.

To report a pesticide exposure, call the
Regional Center for Poison Control and Prevention
24 hours a day:
(800) 222-1224 or (888) 244-5131 (TTY)
www.maripoisoncenter.com
If the victim has collapsed or is not breathing, call 911 for an ambulance.

For more information about pesticide products, call the National Pesticide Information Center:
(800) 858-7378
http://npic.ore.st.edu/
What Can Be Done to Support the Work of a Professional

• Anyone with concerns should learn how to identify bed bugs and inspect for them. Cleaning and disinfecting will help to reduce bed bugs and their spread but may not get rid of them completely.

Tools You Can Use

• Bright flashlight
• Small mirror, ideally one with a handle, available from hardware stores
• Magnifying glass
• Blow-dryer
• Paper towels
• Vacuum with crevice tool, brush and plenty of vacuum bags
• Putty knife, playing card or subway card as a crevice tool
• Garbage bags
• Plastic packing tape, sticky traps, glue boards or moat-style traps
• Bucket of soapy water and sponge
Trap and Kill Bed Bugs

- Force bed bugs out of cracks and crevices with a putty knife or an old subway or playing card, or with hot air from a blow-dryer on low airflow setting. Catch them with sticky packing tape or crush them in paper towels. The heat from a blow-dryer will kill bed bugs after 30 seconds of continuous contact.
Clean and Disinfect

• Get rid of clutter to reduce the places bed bugs can hide. Consider putting non-essential belongings into storage (or sealing them in plastic bags or bins) until the bed bugs are gone from your home. Check all items for bed bugs before and after storage.

• Wipe off dead bugs, blood stains, eggs and droppings with hot soapy water.

• Wash all clothing and fabrics with bed bug stains in hot water (140°F) and dry on the highest setting for at least 30 minutes to kill bed bugs. Clean fabrics suspected of having bed bugs should also be placed in a hot dryer for at least 30 minutes. After drying, store items in sealed plastic bags until you are sure you have gotten rid of bed bugs.

• Vacuum carpets, floors, bed frames, furniture, cracks and crevices daily, using the brush and crevice tools. After each use, empty the vacuum or seal and dispose of its bag outside of your home.

• Enclose infested mattresses and box springs in “dust mite proof” or “bed bug proof” covers for at least a full year (choose low odor, well-fitting, durable and comfortable covers). Periodically check covers for rips or openings and tape these up.
Seal Cracks and Crevices

• Repair wall cracks, repair or remove any loose wallpaper, and put foam gaskets under loose-fitting outlet and light switch covers.

• Apply caulk to seal crevices and joints in baseboards and gaps on shelving or cabinets.

Getting Rid of Infested Items

• It is not usually necessary to get rid of infested furniture or bedding at the first signs of bed bugs. Cleaning and enclosing is often adequate. When in doubt, ask the pest control professional.

• Box springs should only be discarded if they cannot be covered and are heavily infested.

• Items to be thrown away should be encased in plastic (e.g. mattresses, box springs) or put in plastic bags and labeled with a sign that reads “infested with bed bugs.”
What Landlords and Building Managers Can Do

- Provide tenants with information about bed bugs. Share this guide.

- Encourage everyone to report as soon as they know of, or suspect, a bed bug problem.

- Notify tenants of a verified bed bug problem.

- Have all units, near (on same floor), above and below apartments found to have bed bugs, professionally inspected.

- Hire a pest management professional to treat for bed bugs. Be wary of companies that make unrealistic claims that bed bugs can be controlled with one visit (exception: heat treatment).

- Help tenants if they cannot move furniture themselves or need help to get rid of clutter.

- Give at least a 2-day advance notice of the planned use of pesticides.

- Inspect upon vacancy, and if necessary, treat units to ensure they have no bed bugs or other pests before renting.
More Information?

Report an Infestation
Cambridge Inspectional Services Department
(617) 349-6100
To report a bed bug infestation to a city housing inspector.

Health and Pest Control Questions
Cambridge Public Health Department
(617) 665-3848
For questions about whether there are bed bugs in your home and information on the best ways for getting rid of an infestation.

Furniture Removal
Cambridge Department of Public Works
(617) 349-4800
To arrange for removal of furniture thought to be infested with bed bugs.

Pesticide Exposure
Regional Center for Poison Control and Prevention
Boston Children’s Hospital
(800) 222-1222
To report or ask about pesticide exposures.

Ordering Copies
To order hard copies of this guide, call the Cambridge Public Health Department at
(617) 665-3848.

General Information
Centers for Disease Control (CDC)
www.cdc.gov/bedbugs
Key Messages about Bed Bugs

- Anyone can get bed bugs. Bed bugs are not attracted to dirty living conditions, but may be harder to eliminate in cluttered spaces.

- Seek help immediately if you find or suspect the presence of bed bugs.

- Sealing cracks and small holes will help to reduce hiding places and prevent bed bugs from crawling between apartments.

- Cooperate with your neighbors, landlord and pest management provider. It takes a group effort to get rid of bed bugs effectively.

- Do not use pesticide bombs or foggers to control pests. They can make conditions worse.

- It can be difficult to get rid of bed bugs, but the advice in this guide should help.

Adapted with permission from the New York City Department of Mental Health and Hygiene Guide to Preventing and Getting Rid of Bed Bugs Safely.
Illustrations by David Cain.