



Health Topics

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Bed Bugs



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What are bed bugs?

Bed bugs are small parasitic insects that feed solely on the blood of warm-blooded animals. There are two species of bed bugs causing nuisance to humans, namely the common bed bug, *Cimex lectularius*, and the tropical bed bug, *Cimex hemipterus*. The former is distributed worldwide while the latter is mainly found in tropical regions. Both species are found in Hong Kong.

Although the presence of bed bugs has traditionally been seen as a problem in developing countries, it has recently been spreading rapidly in parts of the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, other parts of Europe and Korea.

What is the life cycle of bed bugs?

Bed bugs go through the egg, nymph and adult stages. The eggs hatch in about one week at 18 to 25°C; the nymphal stage takes 14 to 30 days to complete. The life span of adult bed bugs may reach 9-18 months, and six to seven generations could be produced under favourable conditions per year. Bed bugs are usually transported from place to place through items such as luggage, clothing, bedding and furniture.

Do bed bugs spread disease?

Bed bugs are currently not known to spread disease.

What are the signs of bed bug infestation?

People at risk of getting bed bug bites when visiting a bed bug-affected area, especially for those who stay in areas with high turnover of occupants (e.g. dorm rooms and hotels). Bite marks are often found on body parts not covered while sleeping (e.g. face, neck, arms, and hands). These bite marks may take as long as 14 days to develop in some people. Individual responses to bites vary, ranging from no visible effect to small red spots, to more severe allergic reactions. Allergic symptoms can include enlarged bite marks and painful swellings at the bite site. Bites may cause itching, which can lead to excessive scratching that increases the chance of secondary skin infection.

Bed bugs may be found in the fold of mattresses and sheets. In addition, bed bugs' exoskeletons or rusty-colored spots (bed bugs' excreta) may be found on the mattress or nearby furniture.

How to manage bed bug bites?

Bed bug bites usually resolve in one to two weeks. Individuals should avoid scratching the bites and keep the affected area clean. Symptomatic treatment can be given to relieve discomfort. For patients with severe allergic reaction to bites, hospitalization with supportive management may be required.

What to do if signs of bed bug are found?

- Wash infested blankets and bedclothes in hot water (60°C), then sun-dry or iron
- Seal items that cannot be heat-treated in plastic bags and place in a freezer (-18°C) for 24 hours

- Apply hot air or steam directly to the cracks and crevices where bed bugs are found
- Apply residual insecticides to treat furniture, cracks and crevices in floors and walls where bed bugs are found
- Consider appointing a pest control company for providing professional services on bed bug control and prevention

Any special advice for people traveling to bed bug-affected areas?

Before Trip

- Use hard-cased luggage if possible to prevent bed bugs from attaching to it.
- Pack your clothing in re-sealable plastic bags to prevent bed bugs from attaching to it.

During Trip

- Check beds, pillows, mattress and upholstered furniture for bed bugs, and change room if there are signs of bed bugs;
- Avoid placing luggage on carpet, place it on cabinet or shelf
- Keep clothing in luggage and keep luggage closed when not in use

After Trip

- Check luggage and clothing carefully for bed bugs
- If in doubt, manage the clothing and items with hot water and steam as advised above.

