10 things you should know about bed bugs

Source: Zach DeVries, UK assistant professor of urban entomology

Few pests strike terror in the heart of more Americans than bed bugs. These insects were eradicated in the United States in the 1950s through the use of the insecticide DDT. However, DDT was banned in the 1970s due to its environmental and human health risks, and the pest reemerged with a vengeance in the early 2000s.

In the 20 years since their resurgence, control options have improved, and professional pest control companies can effectively eradicate them from homes. But bed bugs remain a major problem and a mystery for many people.

Here are 10 things you should know about bed bugs:

1. **You can see them.** Bed bug eggs are about the size of a poppy seed, and adults are about the size of an apple seed.
2. **We move them around.** Scientists suspect the No.1 way bed bugs move from place to place is by humans. Bed bugs do not necessarily travel on us but hitch rides on our belongings. One of the easiest ways to reduce your risk of getting bed bugs is to not pick up furniture lying on the side of the road. If you do pick up roadside furniture and mattresses, ask a pest control professional to look it over for signs of bed bugs before bringing the item inside.
3. **Bed bugs cannot survive outdoors.** Bed bugs cannot survive in environments below 10 degrees F or hotter than 140 degrees F.
4. **Watch out for unexplained bites**. Unexplained, itchy bites are often the first sign someone has a bed bug problem. If you have bites, you should look for bed bugs around areas of your home that you frequent. That said, many things can be responsible for unexplained bites (most of which are not insects).
5. **Beds aren’t their only home.** As their name suggests, they do hide in beds but are also found in crevices near where their preferred hosts, humans, spend a lot of time and where they can hide undisturbed. These places can include couches, tables, nightstands, headboards and floors. Bed bugs can be found on fabric, wood and metal surfaces.
6. **They consume only blood.** While they will feed on pets, people are their preferred hosts. They usually only like to stay on people long enough to feed and then they will return to their hiding spot.
7. **They do not transmit diseases.** However, their bites are very itchy and can cause a secondary infection.
8. **Bed bugs are expensive to control**. Getting rid of bed bugs is a very labor intensive and detail-oriented process. It often requires more than one visit from a pest control professional.
9. **Bed bug addendums are becoming more common**. If you rent, review your lease carefully for a bed bug clause or addendum. Many rental property owners are using these documents to place the responsibility of bed bug control on their tenants. Before signing a lease, discuss with your landlord about who would be responsible for controlling bed bugs if they are found in your rental.
10. **Let the pros handle them**. Pest control professionals have very effective chemical and nonchemical tools and methods to manage bed bugs. Pest control companies have greatly improved their techniques since bed bugs reemerged. Attempting to treat them on your own is not a good idea. Bed bugs are highly resistant to pyrethroids, which is the most common active ingredient in commercially available insecticides. If you try to control the population, you may accidentally cause the bugs to spread to other areas of your home as they flee your insecticide treatment.

More information about bed bugs is available in the University of Kentucky Department of Entomology’s ENTFACT 636. It is available online at <https://bit.ly/3HQ0Toe> or by contacting the (COUNTY NAME) office of the UK Cooperative Extension Service.

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