

# Bed Bug Relief Guide

## for Tenants and Homeowners



### What Are Bed Bugs?

Bed bugs are insects that feed on blood. Adult bed bugs are oval, reddish brown bugs about the size of a large apple seed (1/4 inch long). Younger bed bugs are smaller and can be white to reddish brown. They are very flat when not fed, and round when fed. Their eggs are whitish, pear-shaped and about the size of a pinhead. Clusters of 10 to 50 eggs can be found in cracks and crevices. Bed bugs are wingless and cannot fly or jump, but are able to hide in very small locations because of their flattened bodies.

They hide during the day and look for people to bite at night. Bed bug bites are itchy, red welts that look similar to mosquito bites. Bed bugs do not transmit diseases. However, when people scratch open the sores they can become infected. People carry bed bugs into their homes, often in infested luggage, clothing, used furniture, or bedding. There is no one-step process or chemical that can be used to control bed bugs.



Fed and unfed bed bugs at various stages of growth.  
(Photo Credit: Allison Taisey)

### Stopping Your Bed Bug Problem

#### 1. Find Where the Bugs Are

- Remove ALL bed sheets, comforters, pillows cases and any clothing on the floor and place them directly into sealed garbage bags to be washed.
- Inspect beds with a flashlight and carefully look for bed bugs and staining along mattress seams, inside box springs, on the bed frame and behind the headboard. Usually the first sign of a bed bug infestation are small reddish brown stains on your mattress, box spring and sheets left by bed bugs.
- Bedbugs can be difficult to find because they often hide in cracks and crevices such as mattress seams. You can run a flat object such as a dull knife or playing card along cracks and seams to force them out of hiding.
- Inspect the entire bedroom including drapes, clothes on the floor, and furniture for bed bugs and staining. Pay close attention to tight spaces where bed bugs may be hiding such as along baseboards, behind electrical outlet plates, behind loose wallpaper, between joints in bed frames and other furniture, at carpet edges, behind baseboards, behind drawers, behind pictures on the walls—anything and everything that is in the room where the infestation has been noted.

#### 2. Remove Bed Bugs and Bed Bug Eggs

- Use a vacuum cleaner with a brush attachment to clean your mattress, box spring, and bed frame. Vacuum contents should be immediately emptied outside in a plastic bag, then sealed and placed in an outdoor trash container.
- Use a flat object such as a dull knife or playing card along cracks and seams to force bed bugs out of hiding so you can vacuum them up.
- Use a stiff scrub brush to remove eggs from mattress seams and other shallow cracks and crevices.
- Vacuum floors and use a crevice tool or the vacuum nozzle to clean baseboard edges.



#### 3. Cover Your Mattress

- Now that you have taken steps to clean the bed, you must immediately cover the mattresses with zippered covers labeled “allergen rated” or “for bed bugs.” The best covers are woven polyester covers. Less costly vinyl and other polyester covers will also work, but are more likely to tear.
- The zipper flap on the mattress cover should be covered with a piece of duct tape to seal the seam.
- Bed bugs will live for a year without feeding, so it is important to leave the mattress covers on for at least twelve months after it appears that the bed bugs have stopped biting.

#### 4. Wash Bedding, Clothing and Other Items

- Wash all bedding and clothing bagged in Step 1 in hot water and place in the dryer for 20 minutes to kill bed bugs.
- Wool items, plush toys, shoes and other non washable items should be placed in the dryer at the highest dryer setting for 20 minutes.
- Seal and throw away bags used to move laundry to be washed.
- Clean clothing and sheets should be stored in sealed bags or sealed plastic containers until the bed bug problem is stopped.
- Wash and dry all sheets, blankets, and pillow cases at least once or twice a week.

#### 5. Keep bed bugs out - Make Your Bed an Island

- Place bed legs in ClimbUp® Interceptors to prevent bed bugs from climbing up bed legs. These can be purchased on the internet. Placing bed legs in plastic containers filled with water with a drop of dish detergent or oil may also work. If you have a deep carpet, put a board under the bowl to help prevent it from cracking under the weight of the bed.
- If you only have a mattress on the floor, wash bedding daily and inspect the mattress until you can get a bed frame with legs.
- Pull your bed away from the wall so that your bed and bedding (blanket, sheets, etc) does not touch the wall.
- Remove bed skirts and make sure bedding does not touch the floor or other furniture.
- Do not place anything (luggage, unwashed clothes, stuffed toys) onto any bed. Be very careful when returning from a trip—inspect your luggage and travel items for bed bugs.

#### Stop Bites at Night

- Remove bedbugs from your mattress and bed frame
- Cover your mattress and box springs in a special cover
- Wash your bedding frequently
- Make your bed an Island

#### 6. Clean Up Clutter

- It is impossible to get rid of bed bugs without getting rid of clutter.
- Clutter is anything that makes it hard to clean or is a hiding place for bed bugs.
- Pick up, bag up, wash and dry all clothes and other items on your floor.
- Any clutter that you don't need anymore should be thrown away. If you do throw something away, destroy it, or spray paint "Bed Bugs – Do Not Use" on the item in large letters so that no one picks it up and brings it into their home.

#### 7. Get Professional Help

- You CANNOT get rid of bed bugs on your own
- If you rent, you must tell your landlord that you have a bed bug problem right away.
- You or your landlord will need to hire a licensed exterminator (pest control operator) as soon as possible. The longer you wait, the harder it will be to control the infestation.
- Your landlord is required to take care of pest control if you live in a building with two or more apartments, unless your apartment is the only one that is infested. All apartments directly above, below and next to yours must also be treated.
- If you live in a single family building, you are responsible for pest control.
- The pest control operator should inspect your home and provide you with pre-extermination directions which you should follow completely. This may include:
  - Remove clutter from your home before they arrive.
  - Remove, wash, and bag up all clothes including clothes stored in dressers.
  - Move furniture away from walls.
  - They may also ask you to bag other items such as books, toys, or other clutter.
  - Anything that is bagged without cleaning should be tightly sealed in a heavy duty garbage bag, or other bag that can be tightly sealed and will not rip.

#### General Information

First Link: Call 211 or 614-221-6766  
Online: [www.centralohiobedbugs.org](http://www.centralohiobedbugs.org)

#### Rental Housing Enforcement

*For enforcement of rental housing code issues including pest control.*

City of Columbus: 614-645-3111

Franklin County: 614-462-3160

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What pesticides can I use?

**Answer:** Store-bought pesticides are not very effective against bed bugs. Boric acid powder also does not work on bed bugs. Bug bombs and foggers actually make the problem worse because they cause bed bugs to scatter into wall cavities and other areas of the house. Vacuuming bed bugs instead of spraying them with a pesticide is the safest pest control method.

We recommend that you leave pesticide application to a licensed pest control operator. However, if you decide to use a pesticide yourself, make sure that the label says it can be used for bed bugs in order to be safe and use it legally.

#### Important points:

- Strictly follow label directions on how to use.
- To reduce exposure to people, only apply pesticides directly to bed bugs.
- Use a hand pump instead of an aerosol spray, unless the aerosol spray has a straw extension for spraying into cracks and crevices.
- Insecticidal dust can be applied behind baseboards and electrical outlets.
- Never use bug bombs or foggers.
- Never apply pesticide on top of mattresses, on couches, or in areas where children or pets go.

If you are unsuccessful at controlling the bed bugs with pesticides yourself, this can make it harder for a pest control operator later and end up costing more.

### Do I need to throw away my mattresses and furniture?

**Answer:** No, throwing your mattress or furniture away will not solve a bed bug problem. If you have bed bugs in your mattress or couch, they are also living in other places in your house. Any new furniture that you bring into your home will also get bed bugs.

Ask your pest control operator if there is any thing you need to throw away. Even if furniture such as a couch has bed bugs, the pest control operator may be able to treat it. If you do need to throw something away, destroy it, or spray paint “Bed Bugs” on the item in large letters so that no one picks it up and brings it into their home. Do not get new furniture until the pest control operator has finished treating your home and you are sure that the bed bugs are gone.

### How can friends and family avoid bringing bed bugs from my home to theirs?

**Answer:** Bed bugs can travel from one house to another on a person’s clothes, in purses, bags, or suitcases, or on other personal items. Friends and family should take the following steps when visiting your home until you have eliminated the bed bug problem:

- Do not bring in purses, bags, suitcases, or other personal items.
- If possible, avoid sitting on soft furniture such as couches.
- They should remove, wash and dry their clothes immediately upon returning home. If they do not have their own washer and dryer, bag clothes in a tightly sealed bag until they can be washed and dried.

## How do I choose a pest company?

**Answer:** Call three or more companies to get a good idea of the range of costs and services available. Questions to ask include:

**Is the company licensed and insured?**

Only licensed and trained pest control operators may apply pesticides in Ohio. Make sure they are insured in case there is a problem.

**What does the company plan to do?**

The company needs to be able to describe the steps they take to address bed bug problems. They also need to have experience handling infestations in the type of building you live in.

**Do they use IPM?**

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is an approach to pest management that involves using the least toxic approach to control pests to protect people in the home. While this approach will use chemicals for bed bugs, it may also involve sealing cracks and crevices, vacuuming, applying heat and dry steam, sealing up mattresses, and other non-chemical measures.

**Is the price fair and does it vary by service?**

A company that can guarantee control in a few visits or says it has a special chemical that guarantees control is not being honest. Price should vary depending on the type of home, the level of infestation, and the type of IPM you are seeking.

**BEWARE if the pest control company:**

- Cannot show proof of a state license with the Ohio Department of Agriculture.
- Cannot show proof of liability and property damage insurance.
- Uses an unlisted telephone number or address.
- Fails to answer your questions.
- Tries to scare you or force you to sign a sales contract.
- Shows up at your door uninvited and shows evidence of bed bugs from a neighbor's home as an excuse to look at your home.
- Claims to have a secret formula or ingredient.
- Says other companies are illegal or do not provide control.
- Has a price that is much lower than other companies.
- Claims to "protect" or "insulate" your home against infestations.
- Says they have chemical left over from another job and can give you a deal.
- Says they are endorsed by the city, state, a pest management organization or university. Endorsement is not the same as a license.
- Offers a discount or commission for leads to other jobs.