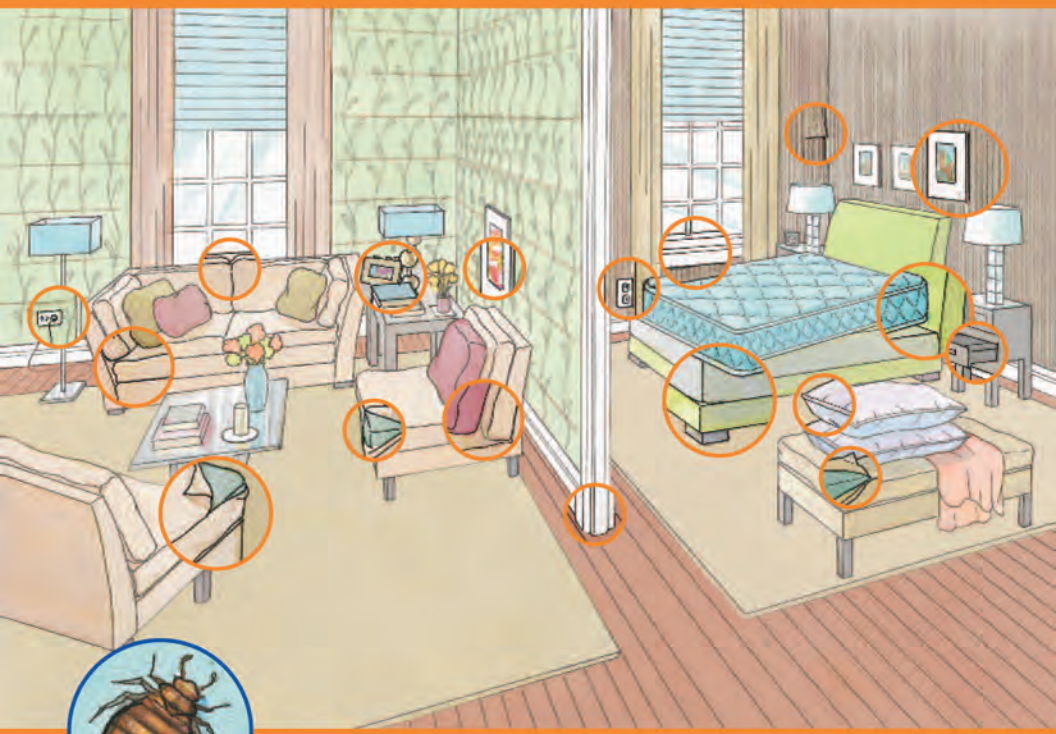
# Preventing and Getting Rid of Bed Bugs Safely



## *A Guide for Property Owners, Managers and Tenants*

*A Healthy Homes Guide*

Allegheny County
ACHD
Health Department

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# Using This Guide

**Bed bug infestations are increasingly common in Allegheny County.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:

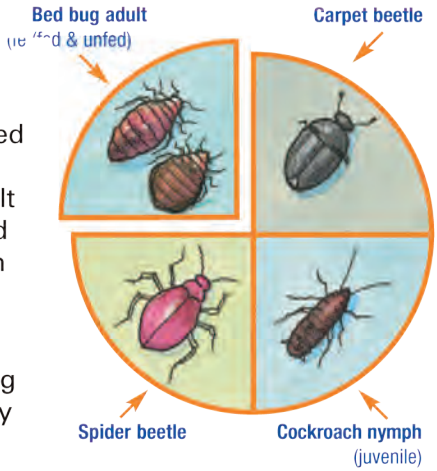
1. Learn more about bed bugs and how they thrive.
2. Prevent bed bugs from infesting your home.
3. Safely rid your home of bed bugs if they do occur.
4. Select and work with a pest control professional.

# 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.

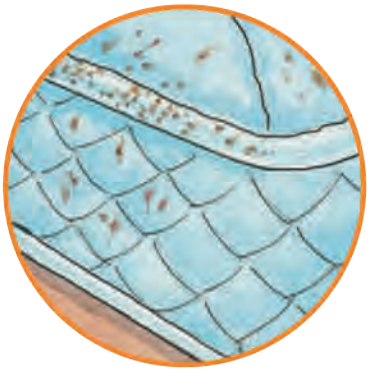
Bed bugs can be easily confused with other small household insects, including carpet beetles, spider beetles and newly hatched cockroaches (nymphs).




### From its markings, droppings and eggs

Blood stains, droppings and eggs can be found in several locations including:

- Mattress seams and tufts, sheets, pillow cases and upholstered furniture.
- Crevices and cracks in furniture.
- Baseboards of walls.



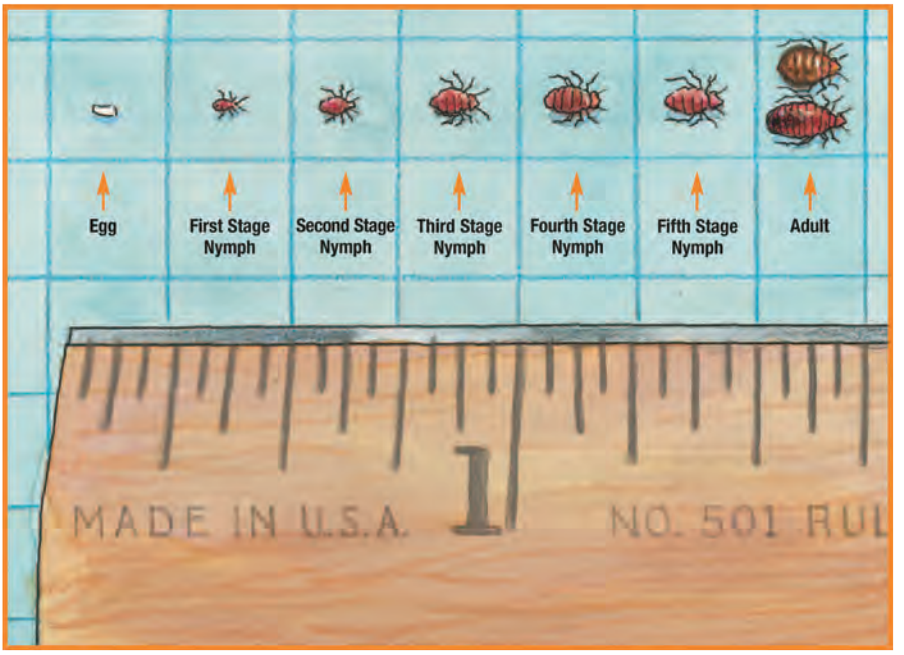
### From its bite

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 itchy welts. The welts usually go away after a few days. Because the bites may resemble mosquito and other insect bites, a bump or welt alone does not mean 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. A female lays 5-7 eggs per week and if fed, will lay 200-500 eggs in her life. Eggs take about 10 days to hatch. Bed bugs are fully grown in 2 to 4 months and can live as long as a year.



## The 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. 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 one's wellbeing. Properly and effectively responding to bed bugs helps to keep anxiety in check.

Some people become so desperate that that they use 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

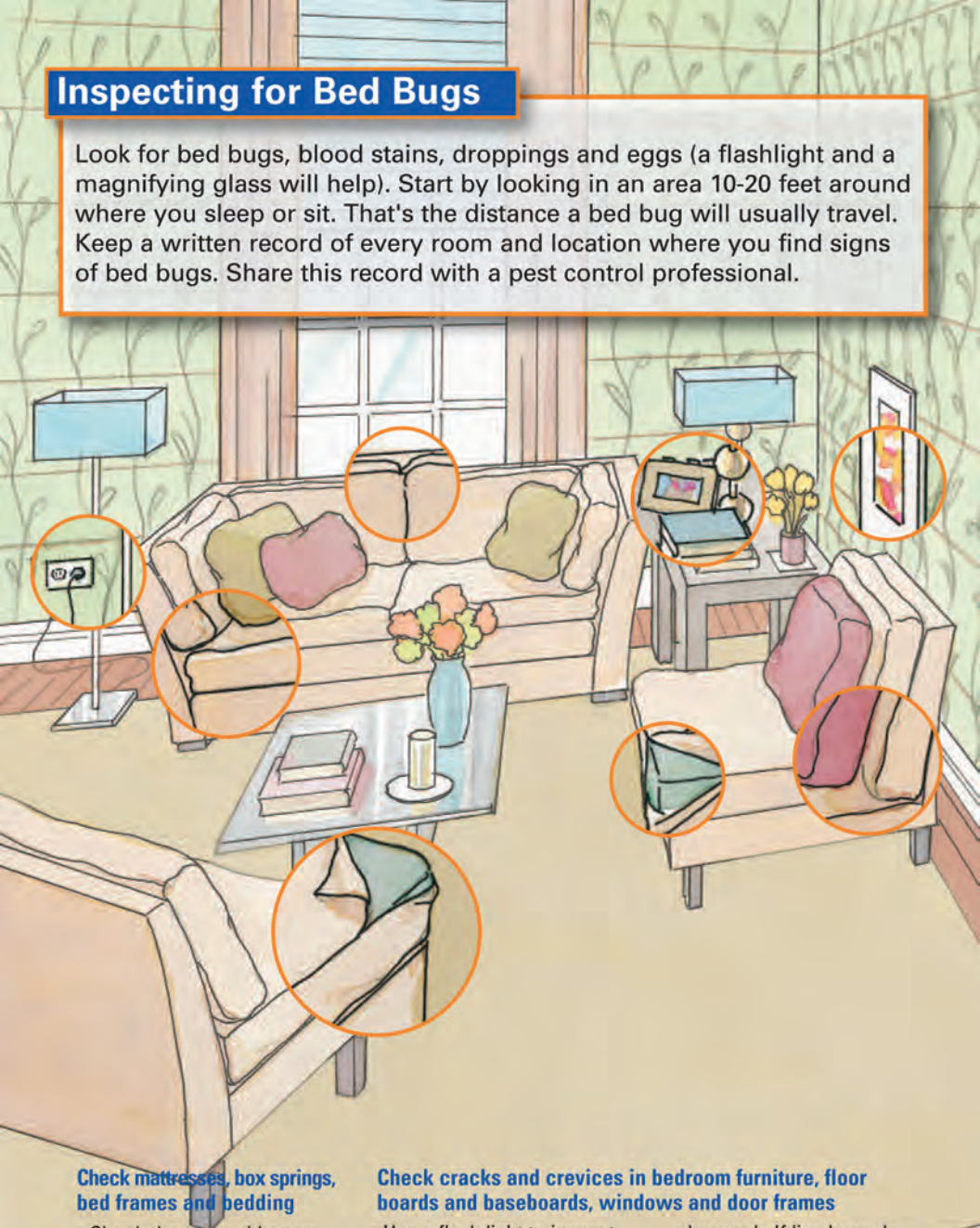
Bed bugs can enter homes by latching onto used furniture, luggage and clothing, and by traveling along connecting pipes and wiring.

- Never bring bed frames, mattresses, box springs or upholstered furniture found on the street into your home.
- Check all used or rented furniture for bed bugs.

- When traveling, inspect the bed and furniture. Keep suitcases off the floor and bed, and inspect them before you leave.
- If you suspect you have been around bed bugs, immediately wash and dry your clothing on hot settings or store it in a sealed plastic bag until you can.
- Seal cracks and crevices with caulk, even if you don't have bed bugs. This will help prevent bed bugs and other pests from coming in.

# Inspecting for Bed Bugs

Look for bed bugs, blood stains, droppings and eggs (a flashlight and a magnifying glass will help). Start by looking in an area 10-20 feet around where you sleep or sit. That's the distance a bed bug will usually travel. Keep a written record of every room and location where you find signs of bed bugs. Share this record with a pest control professional.



### Check mattresses, box springs, bed frames and bedding

- Check the top and bottom seams, tufts and any rips in the covers of mattresses and box springs.
- Look underneath the bed and along the bed frame and headboards.

### Check 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, an old credit or playing 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 a paper towel and throw them away outside your building.
- Remove drawers from furniture and check the inside, top and bottom, joints and even screw holes.

- Remove and check zippers, seams and tufts in cushions of upholstered furniture, and 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 face plates of electrical outlets and light switches (by eye only – do not insert anything into areas with wires). Look in phones, clocks, smoke detectors and toys.

# Getting Rid of Bed Bugs

If you have bed bugs, you shouldn't feel ashamed. Anyone can get bed bugs. Notify your landlord and neighbors. The sooner everyone responds, the more successful everyone will be.

## Choosing and working with a pest control company

Bed bug infestations usually require the services of well-trained, licensed pest management professionals, also called exterminators. Tenants whose landlords do not promptly respond to bed bug complaints can call 311 and file a complaint with the Health Department's Housing & Community Environment Program, and may also hire their own professionals.

There are many pest control companies and licensed pest professionals in Allegheny County. Not all are well trained in managing bed bugs. To get rid of bed bugs, you must choose the right company, be clear about what you want done and monitor performance.

## To choose a good professional...

- Find a company through dependable referrals, directories, professional associations and check to make sure they are licensed
- Interview several companies before choosing. Ask about their training, and their approach to controlling bed bugs. Make sure they follow the procedures described in this guide.
- Agree on a service plan and its cost. Expect at least two treatment visits and a third follow-up visit to confirm that bed bugs have been eliminated. Severe infestations or cluttered apartments may take more visits to eliminate bed bugs.

## A good company will...

- Inspect your property before giving you a price quote or begin any pesticide application.
- Give you a written inspection report, and an action plan of how to prepare for treatment and prevent further infestation.
- Base quotes on inspection findings, not flat fees. The cheapest services are rarely the best.
- Visit often until the job is done.
- Employ qualified, well-trained pest management professionals.
- Educate you on how to prevent bed bugs.
- Work with you until the bed bugs are gone.
- Treat you with respect.

## About the Use of Pesticides

**Bed bug infestations usually require the use of pesticides. Only professionals should apply pesticides for bed bugs. Foggers and bug bombs are not effective against them.**

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, and if needed, to use only small amounts of pesticides on their seams only.

***To report, or ask about pesticide exposures, call the Poison Control Center 24 hours a day:***
***• English-speaking callers, call: (212) POISONS (764-7667)***
***• Spanish-speaking callers, call: (212) VENENOS (836-3667)***

***For more information about pesticide products, call the National Pesticide Information Center at (800) 858-7378.***

We should update phone numbers here. What is preferred?

## What Can Be Done to Support the Work of a Professional

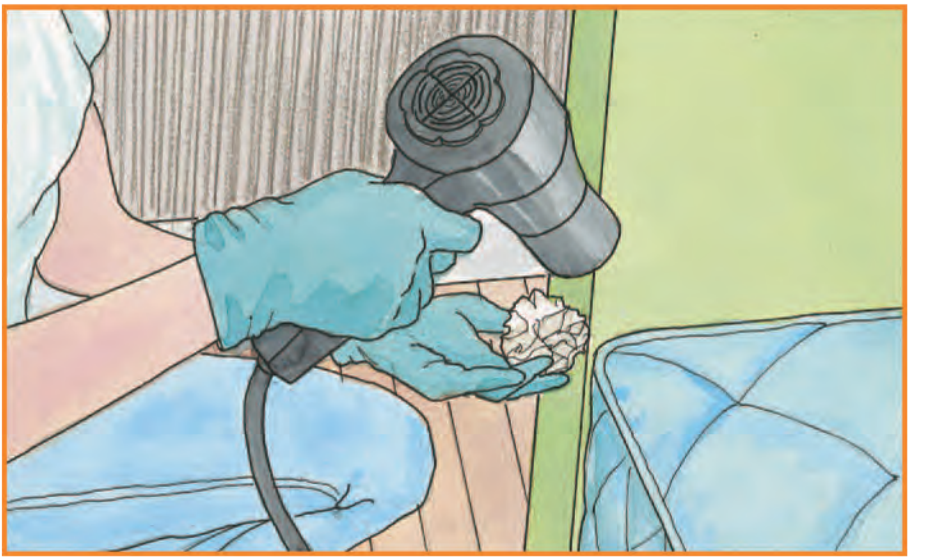
Everyone should learn how to identify bed bugs and inspect for them. Cleaning and disinfecting will help to reduce bed bugs and their spread but may not get rid of them totally.

## 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, cockroach sticky traps or mouse glue boards
- 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 credit or playing card, or with hot air from a blow-dryer on low setting. Catch them with sticky packing tape or crush them in paper towels. The heat from blow-dryers will kill bed bugs after 30 seconds of continuous contact.



## Clean and Disinfect

- Get rid of clutter to reduce places bed bugs can hide. After checking them for bed bugs, consider putting non-essential belongings into storage until the bed bugs are gone from your home. Check all items again before returning.

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

- Wash all items showing bed bug stains in hot water (140°F) and dry on the highest setting for at least 20 minutes. Other clean items suspected of having bed bugs should be placed in a hot dryer for at least 20 minutes to kill bed bugs. 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. Empty the vacuum or seal and dispose of its bag outside of your home after each use.

- Enclose infested mattresses and box springs in a cover that is labeled "allergen rated," "for dust mites," or "for bed bugs" for at least a full year. Periodically check for rips or openings and tape these up.

## Seal Cracks and Crevices

- Repair cracks in plaster, repair or remove any loose wallpaper and tighten light switch covers.

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

## Getting Rid of Infested Items

- Usually, it is not necessary to get rid of furniture or bedding at the first signs of bed bugs. Cleaning and enclosing is often adequate.

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

- Use plastic sheeting (shrink /pallet wrap) or place securely in plastic bags any items to be thrown away. Label with a sign that says “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 bed bugs as soon as they know of a problem.
- Notify tenants, and inspect all units adjacent to, above and below apartments found to have bed bugs.
- 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.

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

**For additional copies of this guide, call 311 and ask for a copy of "Preventing and Getting Rid of Bed Bugs Safely."**

**More information on bed bugs and other pests is available at http://nyc.gov/health.**

***To report, or ask about pesticide exposures, call the New York City Poison Control Center at (212) Poisons.***

***A Healthy Homes Guide***

# Key Messages about Bed Bugs

- Learn to identify the signs of bed bugs.
- Dirty living conditions do not cause bed bugs but cleaning and removing clutter will help in controlling them.
- Anyone can get bed bugs. Seek help immediately if you find them.
- 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. Getting rid of bed bugs needs to involve everyone.
- Do not use pesticide bombs or foggers to control pests. They can make conditions worse.
- It is hard, but not impossible to get rid of bed bugs. The advice in this guide will help.

Allegheny County Health Department

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Keeping Homes Healthy & Safe