

Bed Bug FAQ

What are bed bugs?

Bed bugs (*Cimex lectularius*) are small, flat, parasitic insects that feed solely on the blood of people and animals while they sleep. Bed bugs are reddish-brown in color, wingless, range from 1mm to 7mm (roughly the size of Lincoln's head on a penny), and can live several months without a blood meal.

Do Bed Bugs Spread Disease?

While bed bugs are a nuisance, according to the CDC, bed bugs are not known to spread disease. However, bed bugs can be an annoyance because their presence may cause itching and loss of sleep. Sometimes the itching can lead to excessive scratching that can sometimes increase the chance of a secondary skin infection.

What health risks to bed bugs pose?

A bed bug bite affects each person differently. Bite responses can range from an absence of any physical signs of the bite, to a small bite mark, to a serious allergic reaction. Bed bugs are not considered to be dangerous; however, an allergic reaction to several bites may need medical attention.

What are the signs and symptoms of the presence of bed bugs?

One of the easiest ways to identify the presence of bed bugs is by the tell-tale bite marks on the face, neck, arms, hands, or any other body parts while sleeping. However, these bite marks may take as long as 14 days to develop in some people so it is important to look for other clues when determining if bed bugs have infested an area. These signs include: the bed bugs' exoskeletons after molting, bed bugs in the fold of mattresses and sheets, rusty-colored blood spots due to their blood-filled fecal material that they excrete on the mattress or nearby furniture, and a sweet musty odor.

How do I know if I've been bitten by a bed bug?

It is hard to tell if you've been bitten by a bed bug unless you find bed bugs or signs of infestation. When bed bugs bite, they inject an anesthetic and an anticoagulant that prevents a person from realizing they are being bitten. Most people do not realize they have been bitten until bite marks appear anywhere from one to several days after the initial bite. The bite marks are similar to that of a mosquito or a flea — a slightly swollen and red area that may itch and be irritating. The bite marks may be random or appear in a straight line. Other symptoms of bed bug bites include insomnia, anxiety, and skin problems that arise from profuse scratching of the bites. Because bed bug bites affect everyone differently, some people may have no reaction and will not develop bite marks or any other visible signs of being bitten. Other people may be allergic to the bed bugs and can react adversely to the bites. These allergic symptoms can include enlarged bite marks, painful swellings at the bite site, and, on rare occasions, anaphylaxis.

If it's not bed bugs, what is it?

Many bugs bite and irritate the skin. It is important to remain calm and investigate the situation further before jumping to a conclusion. Conduct a visual inspection of your person and space for additional clues. Spending time outdoors or leaving windows open can expose you to biting insects such as mosquitoes.

How are bed bugs treated and prevented?

Bed bug bites usually do not pose a serious medical threat. The best way to treat a bite is to avoid scratching the area and apply antiseptic creams or lotions and take an antihistamine. Bed bug infestations are commonly treated by insecticide spraying. If you suspect that you have an infestation, review the Pace University Bed Bug Protocol and contact the Residential Life/Housing Operations staff.

What do bed bugs look like?

View the approximate size of a bed bug throughout its lifecycle.

