



BED BUGS FACT SHEET

INTRODUCTION

Bed bugs have been common throughout history but they almost disappeared from the US when DDT began to be used a pesticide in 1939. In the last ten years, however, they've made a resurgence due to several factors: an increase in global travel, changes in the way pesticides are used, and the bugs' growing resistance to different pesticides. They had even started to develop a resistance to DDT before it was banned in 1972.

In the last few years bed bug infestations have become fairly common in people's houses and apartments; they've also occurred in hotels, hospitals, even offices and stores. Bed bugs are not a sign of uncleanliness or bad housekeeping. They're attracted by your body heat and the carbon dioxide in your breath—not by garbage, dust or dirt—but it's still a good idea to keep your bedroom vacuumed and uncluttered because that will make it easier to detect their presence before the problem becomes severe.

Some landlords in the country are now screening applicants with a history of bed bug infestations. Landlords can reject a tenant's application if the tenant previously lived in an apartment with bed bugs.

A landlord can't use a bed bug infestation as grounds for evicting the tenant unless: 1) the landlord can prove that the tenant caused the problem, AND 2) that causing the infestation is a clear lease violation, AND 3) the landlord has given the tenant proper notice under Wis. Stats. Chapter 704.

BIOLOGY

Bed bugs are small brown insects that look a little like wood ticks and are about the size of an apple seed. They typically spend the day in small cracks and crevices in the bedroom—often in the bed itself. At night they bite and feed on the blood of the person sleeping in the bed, then return to their hiding place. Some people have no reaction to the bites, but many people develop a small welt similar to a mosquito bite. Bed bugs are not known to transmit any disease, but of course they can still make your life miserable.

Bed bugs live for ten or eleven months under normal conditions. An adult female can lay several eggs a day and hundreds over her lifetime. The eggs are tiny and hard to detect. Immature bed bugs have the same basic shape as the adults but are smaller and lighter in color. A bed bug molts (sheds its skin) five times before becoming an adult capable of reproducing. It has to have at least one meal of fresh blood before each molt. Under ideal conditions a bed bug can go from hatchling to adult in as little as a month.

This information provided by the Tenant Resource Center

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No part of this brochure should be regarded as legal advice. It is the sole responsibility of landlords and tenants to be familiar with the law. If legal assistance is required, the services of an attorney should be sought.

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The shape of the bug changes after it has fed. Before feeding, it's quite flat (in order to hide in cracks) and roundish. After feeding, the bug is longer, no longer flat, and is more of a purplish color. Under the right conditions adults can survive up to one year without feeding, which is one reason it can be so hard to get bed bugs out of your home.

DIAGNOSIS

A bed bug infestation can be hard to detect if a person isn't looking for one. The bugs stay hidden during the day, and people might think the bites came from fleas, mosquitoes, or poison ivy. Small dark stains on your sheets or elsewhere might be evidence of a bed bug infestation. You might also notice the cast-off skins they shed when molting.

70% of bed bugs are usually found on the bed itself: in the seams of the mattress, inside the box springs, and in cracks or small spaces in the frame. If the infestation is large enough, the bugs can often be found elsewhere in the bedroom: in cracks in the floor or on the wall, behind baseboards, under the edge of the carpet, behind pictures hanging on the wall, behind the plates in electrical outlets, inside radios and other electronic equipment. They prefer hiding in wood but will make do with other kinds of material if there isn't much wood in the room. The more clutter there is in the room, the more places they have to hide.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR TREATMENT?

In Madison, the landlord is responsible for pest control in buildings where there is more than one apartment [MGO 27.07(2)(d)], but the landlord and pest control professional can't get rid of the infestation without the tenant's help. The landlord cannot make tenants pay for treatment.

Preventive inspection by both tenants and landlords is the best way to keep infestations under control. Landlords and tenants should keep an open dialogue about bed bugs and not point fingers at each other.

Call the building inspector if your landlord refuses to treat the apartment for bed bugs. Outside the City of Madison, check with your local building inspector to see if there are any local ordinances that cover pest infestation.

TREATMENT

If you think you have bed bugs in your apartment, call your landlord as soon as possible so a pest control professional can be consulted. Trying to get rid of the bugs on your own might worsen the infestation or endanger your own health. For example, an over-the-counter pesticide like Raid® doesn't have much of an effect on bed bugs, so spraying it on your mattress is worse for you than for the bugs. The same is true of foggers and “bug bombs”, which won't kill the bugs but might drive them into other rooms.

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It's usually not necessary to throw out your furniture to rid your apartment of bed bugs, and you certainly shouldn't bring in a new bed if there are still bugs in the apartment. Encasing a mattress and box spring with special protectors will ultimately kill all the bugs living on them, and that's cheaper than buying a new bed.

Ask the pest control professional what you should do to prepare your apartment for their visit. Vacuuming is usually a good idea. (When you're done, remove the vacuum bag and seal it in a plastic bag before throwing it out.)

An effective way to decontaminate bedding and clothing is to put the items in a dryer on high heat for 20 minutes. Take them to the dryer in a sealed plastic bag, then throw out the bag. Afterwards, store the items in a new plastic bag so they won't be recontaminated.

Don't give up too soon. It takes a while to completely eliminate a bed bug infestation. A pest control professional might need to treat the apartment three or four times before the infestation is eliminated.

PREVENTION

Bringing bed bugs into your home is a lot easier than getting them out, so you should take steps to prevent an infestation.

Usually bed bugs enter an apartment by hitchhiking on a piece of furniture, clothing, or luggage (although they have been known to migrate on their own to other apartments, and sometimes even to other buildings.)

Don't bring discarded furniture that you find on the curb into your apartment. If you buy a piece of used furniture from a thrift store or yard sale, check it carefully before bringing it into your apartment.

Be aware that you might pick up bed bugs in hotel rooms when you're traveling. Bed bugs have been known to show up in the fanciest hotels. It's not a bad idea to check your hotel room's mattress and headboard for signs of an infestation. If you find evidence of bed bugs, let the management know and ask for another room. Even if the room appears to be free of bugs, put your suitcase in the empty bathtub overnight and keep it off the furniture as much as possible.

Clutter in the bedroom provides more places for bugs to hide. Getting rid of clutter beforehand helps prevent infestations. Tidiness and regular vacuuming help detect an infestation early, thus making it easier to treat.

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WEBSITES

<http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/factsheets/bed-bug-tips.pdf>

Ten simple pieces of advice from the Environmental Protection Agency.

<http://www.entomology.wisc.edu/diaglab/labnotes/bedbug.pdf>

Article on bed bugs in Wisconsin by Phil Pellitteri of the UW Insect Diagnostic Lab.

<http://www.ca.uky.edu/entomology/entfacts/ef636.asp>

Overview by Mike Potter, a professor of entomology at the University of Kentucky who is a leading expert on bed bugs.

<http://spcpweb.org/>

Website for Chicago's Safer Pest Control Project has a number of articles on bed bugs. The SPCP promotes Integrated Pest Management (IPM), a practice that emphasizes nonchemical solutions and takes a more holistic approach to pest removal.

http://www.nysipm.cornell.edu/publications/bed_bugs/files/bed_bug.pdf

Overview of bed bug problems from the Cornell Cooperative Extension in New York State. Emphasis is on IPM.

<http://bedbugger.com/>

Blog about media coverage and legislation related to bed bugs.

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