

Bummer, Bed Bugs Biting
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Since becoming the Extension Educator in Pennington County, several clients have brought in bed bugs or asked questions about them. Bed bugs and humans have lived together since man was dwelling in caves. Prior to chemical control, bed legs were placed into cans of kerosene. DDT is often given credit for the absence of bed bugs in recent history. Currently however, infestations are becoming more common throughout the United States. Commonly dispersed to new areas by human travel, bed bugs have not been shown to carry diseases but people in infested dwellings often experience insomnia, anxiety or psychological stress.

Bed bugs are insects in the suborder of animals known as Heteroptera or the “true bugs”. They are wingless, very flat and reddish-brown in color. Adults measure in between 3/8 to 1/4 inch in length while immature bugs are typically light brown or yellowish in color and smaller. After feeding they may not resemble a bed bug at all as they will have a distended body and a bright red color due to the blood that has been ingested. It is important to have a positive identification if an infestation is suspected. Bed bugs have a close relative, the bat bug, that looks very similar but control is entirely different.

Hiding in cracks and crevices as small as the width of a credit card bed bugs emerge at night to feed on humans and sometimes our pets. Humans are often bitten on the neck, arms, shoulders, ankles, and legs. Bites may look similar to mosquito bites or rash-like depending on the sensitivity of the individual. Seldom used hotel rooms and vacant apartments can harbor bed bugs for over a year because they can survive without feeding for more than a year.

Bed bugs move into a new location by way of several means including: being picked up at hotels or motels in luggage, infested used furniture, hitching a ride on clothing, and family members living away from home. Bed bugs will move from bedroom to bedroom or apartment to apartment as populations increase within a building.

Bed bugs produce liquid feces that resemble dried blood spots. These spots will occur on the mattress, bedding, bed frame, and wall of the bedroom. They also produce a musty sweet smell that can be noticeable when large populations are present. Research has shown that up to 90 percent of the bed bugs in a location will be within 15 feet of the bed, however, bed bugs may be found in other locations, especially if people have been sleeping on the sofa.

If you suspect bed bugs you should remove all bedding and look for bugs or fecal spots and smears. Examine the mattress and box spring, even removing the dust cover on the box spring to inspect the wooden frame. Carefully, examine the cracks where the wood pieces of the frame come together. Peel back fabric that is stapled to the frame. Within the room look behind picture frames, in books, inside telephones or radios, on bedside furniture, along the carpet, next to the wall and in the electrical receptacles within a fifteen foot radius of the bed.

If you find evidence of bed bug activity, thoroughly clean any infected rooms. Launder all bedding and dry in a hot dryer. Vacuum infested areas, including the mattress, box spring,

furniture, bed, headboard, sofa, and where the carpet meets the wall. When done throw out the vacuum cleaner bag as bugs can crawl out of the vacuum. Replace the mattress if it is not in very good shape. If it is salvageable purchase a bed bug approved mattress cover and encase the mattress for at least one year to be sure all remaining bugs are dead. Consider hiring an experienced pest control professional to spray insecticide. Multiple treatments will be needed to be sure all bugs are killed.

When staying at a hotel or motel always inspect the room for bed bugs. Look for the dark fecal spots or smears on the bed and nearby. Even if you don't find bed bugs in the room never place luggage on the floor near the head of the bed.

Source: Barb Ogg, Extension Educator, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lancaster County

If you have questions about bed bugs feel free to call me at 605-394-2188 or email me at ricky.abrahamson@sdstate.edu.