

Bedbugs

The Insect

Adult bedbugs have flat oval bodies, are reddish brown in color, and similar in size to a dog tick. The eyes are widely separated and the abdomen has eleven segments, which expand during feeding.

- Before biting, adult bedbugs are brown in color. After feeding, the color appears more dull red, and the body of the bedbug gets bigger. Young bugs may look more clear before feeding and bright red after feeding.
- They live in cracks and crevices in mattresses and cushions, bed frames and other structures. The female lays her eggs in these areas.
- They are attracted by warmth and carbon dioxide (breath). The person does not feel the bite of the bedbug, which attaches for 5 to 10 minutes.

The Bite

Bedbugs typically bite at night on exposed areas of skin. The bites may be found in the morning or one to two days later, and may line up in a row. The bite itself is painless but the spot usually becomes itchy. It may look like a small raised pink dot with a puncture in the middle, or a hive (like a mosquito bite). Some people have more severe reactions with blisters.

Bites heal in three to six weeks. New spots will appear as older ones heal, since the bugs will continue to bite. Bedbug bites can become infected from scratching. There is no proof that bedbugs carry other diseases.

Diagnosis

Bedbug bites look just like bites from other bugs. Bedbugs are suspected if a series of bites in a row are found on awakening or if specks of blood are found on linens, mattresses, or behind wallpaper. Bedbugs produce a pungent odor that is recognizable to those familiar with it, but only when many bedbugs are present.

Treatment

Bedbug bites do not typically require treatment. Severe itch may be treated with cortisone cream or oral antihistamines like Benadryl.

Wash the bites with soap and water and avoid scratching to prevent infection. If a fever develops and the area becomes painful or oozes, antibiotics may be needed for infection, so call our office. People who use daily antihistamines may have a harder time recognizing bedbug bites.

Eliminating the Bedbugs

If bedbugs are found, inspect the home to find all of the hiding areas. Most of the bedbugs will be located next to the feeding site, but some will spread to other areas (and apartments). Non-chemical controls include vacuuming, heat treatments, laundering, and freezing articles. Several insecticides are available and at least three formulations should be used to avoid failures from resistance or missed bugs. This should be done by a professional.

Additional information: <http://www2.epa.gov/bedbugs>