

## Bugs in Your Bed: Yikes

Do you ever lay awake at night, and have the feeling that you're not alone? You know that there's no one else in the room, but you just can't shake the feeling that someone # or something # is there beside you.

This is not a horror story, at least not the B-movie type. It's the story of the bed bug, a creature that has caused more night sweats and sleepless nights than all of the horror movie characters combined. This unwanted bedmate is the lowly *Cimex lectularius*, commonly known as the Bed Bug.

### Background

There are several different members of the bed bug family. The most common goes by the scientific name of *Cimex lectularius*.

Experts believed that the very existence of bed bugs had been controlled in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s. The insects have made a return, however, partly due to the increase of travel and migration from other countries.

Bed bugs are parasites that feed on the blood of humans and other warm-blooded animals. If you believe that only you are victim to bed bug bites, you're wrong. Pets are also common hosts to these wingless pests. Birds, dogs, cats and virtually every species of mammal are susceptible to bed bug bites. Anything that comes into direct contact with an infested bed, sofa or carpet can be affected.

It's hard to spot bed bugs because of their diminutive size and their nocturnal habits. In the final stage of maturity, adult bed bugs grow to about ¼ inch in length. The insects are flat and oval shaped when viewed from top to bottom. The bugs are transparent when young, growing to white, then cream, then a darker brown shade as they mature. If a bed bug appears to be red, it's likely just had a big meal.

### Life Span

After feeding from a host, an adult bed bug can live for more than a year without sucking blood. Younger bed bugs need to feed more often and can live only several months, or even just one month, without food. So even if a bed or other infested area remains vacant from human or pet contact for many months, there is a good chance that the bed bugs will survive. After an adult bed bug has three or four feeding sessions it will lay eggs and complete its life span.

### Habitat

Bed bugs normally thrive in dark places within the home. It is the insect's instinct to live within crevices and dark, miniscule places where they will not be easily detected and killed. In the home, bed bugs can be found living in beneath or underneath of the bed. They will also thrive in the folds and creases of pillows and bedding. They remain undetected during the day, but very actively hunt for food at night. Bed bugs appear to be intelligent creatures, as they know to only attack when the hosts are completely relaxed # while asleep.

### Common Reactions

You may not realize that you have fallen victim to a bed bug bite until a day or two later. There is no stinging sensation or pain while being bitten. The bite will appear red, swollen and itchy as the skin begins to react to the insect's saliva. It can be difficult to distinguish a bed bug bite from a mosquito bite.

### Control and Extermination

Bed bugs are difficult pests to control because of their tiny size and ability to survive without food. There are many pesticides and insecticides that can kill the insects, but of course these are not safe to use where your family and pets live and sleep. Ask a pest control expert for professional advice on controlling and exterminating bed bugs. If you own your home, call local pest control operators in your area. If you are renting, it's your landlord or superintendent's responsibility to take necessary measures and end the infestation.

Bed bugs are certainly unwelcome housemates, but an infestation is not the end of the world. There are measures that you can take and people that can help you to find a permanent solution.