



## Bed Bugs

### What are bed bugs?

Bed bugs are small wingless insects that feed on the blood of warm-blooded animals, like humans. When they hatch, they are about the size of a poppy seed. Adult bed bugs grow to about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of an inch long. They can be almost white just after molting. Then they are tan, deep brown, or burnt orange. After feeding they may have a dark red or black mass in the center of their body. When disturbed they seek shelter in dark crevices or cracks.

Bed bugs like warmth. Bed bugs are most active in the middle of the night when people are sleeping. But they may come out during the day if they are hungry.

Bed bugs tend to stay within 7 feet of their food source. They can live for several months without eating, and they will also move in search of food. Bed bugs are very good "hitchhikers". They can attach themselves to clothing and shoes, hide in furniture, suitcases, and moving boxes, to travel where they can find their next meal. This is how bed bugs can be transported to places like movie theaters, clothing stores, and apartment buildings.



### How do I know if there are bed bugs in my home?

Most people usually discover they have bed bugs after they have been bitten. When they scratch the bites, rashes might appear. Not everyone reacts to bed bug bites or develops a rash after scratching. This makes it hard to find where the bugs are coming from in an apartment building.

Bed bugs leave what looks like dried blood stains after they bite. First check the sheets on your beds. Then check your mattresses, especially in the seams along the edges. Look for small brownish-red specks. You can see adult bed bugs, especially after they have eaten.

Bed bugs do not usually walk around in the open unless there are large numbers of them. They like to hide in places like mattresses, between cushions, and in cracks, baseboards and floor boards, until they are ready to eat again.

A local housing inspector can come to your apartment and inspect for bed bugs. Or you can hire a professional pest management company (exterminators) to inspect. You will get something in writing that says there are bed bugs in your rental.

Once you find out you have bed bugs, you must act fast to keep them from spreading and to get rid of them.

## **I have bed bugs in my home. What do I do now?**

Be careful about spending your money on bed bug products at the store. It is best to have a professional take care of it. Tell your landlord right away **in writing** as soon as you think you have bed bugs in your apartment. Send a copy of this fact sheet to your landlord with a letter asking your landlord to get rid of the bed bugs.

If your landlord does not try to fix the bed bug problem, you have options.

- You can call the local housing inspector to inspect your apartment for bed bugs. A housing inspector can cite the landlord for letting the bed bugs in the building and tell the landlord to fix the problem. The inspector gives a deadline. If the deadline passes and the landlord hasn't done anything, you can file a rent escrow case.
- Calling an inspector can be helpful to get full details on the problem and to have a record of it but you can start a rent escrow case without an inspection. If 14 days have passed since you sent the letter to the landlord and the bed bugs are still in the apartment, you can start a rent escrow.



See our fact sheet [Getting a Landlord to Make Repairs](#) to learn about filing this kind of case.

**Note:** Landlord and tenant advocates do not agree on what the landlord has to do to get rid of the bed bugs. Some landlords don't try at all to get rid of bed bugs, even though the law says it is the landlord's responsibility to make repairs to an apartment. These landlords are clearly violating Minnesota law.

A new decision from the Minnesota Court of Appeals says that when a landlord **does** start extermination they can demand that a tenant get rid of furniture. The landlord is not responsible for replacing it or giving the tenant any money for it. Also, another decision says that a tenant does not get reduced rent during the process- which can take weeks.

### **Professional Exterminators**

Most landlords hire professional exterminators to get rid of bed bugs. Getting rid of bed bugs can take many weeks and hours of preparation. You might be told you have to throw away all your beds and upholstered furniture.

**You need to cooperate completely with the process to exterminate your unit of bed bugs.** For example, clean up your home and get rid of extra things if it is cluttered. Treatment has less chance of working if your home has too much stuff in the way. If you don't make a reasonable effort to cooperate, the treatment might not work and/or your landlord might have grounds to evict you.

## Who has to pay?

It is clear the landlord has to make repairs in an apartment. This includes exterminating pests like bed bugs. The landlord should pay for the extermination although some refuse.

There have been many arguments about whether the labor and costs of bed bug treatment should be covered by the tenant instead. It is expected Minnesota Courts will look at this issue more in the near future to clear it up.

In many cases, a landlord will pay for the exterminator's treatment of the apartment, but will not pay for the cost of preparing the apartment for the exterminator. Or recognize that your use of the apartment is reduced during the weeks of the extermination and maybe your rent should be lowered. These are issues that a court can decide.

**If you need help in preparing the apartment due to a medical condition**, the landlord may need to provide that help under the Fair Housing Act and Minnesota Human Rights Act. Ask for the help in writing and keep a copy for your records.

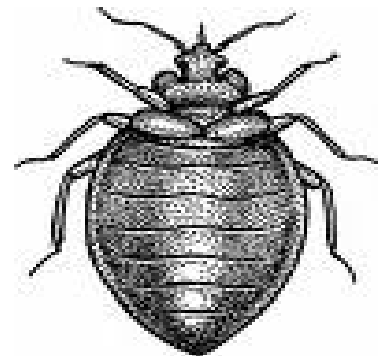
## Keep your eyes out for signs of bed bugs!

Getting rid of bed bugs takes time. Your unit might need several treatments before all the bed bugs are gone. Bed bugs can live a long time and they probably have laid eggs which will hatch. Expect to keep things covered and keep doing the other things you are doing to stop them for at least a year. **You need to keep at it and keep working with a professional exterminator. Follow the steps for treatment until they tell you that the infestation is gone.**

## What can I do to keep bed bugs from spreading?

It is nearly **impossible** to get rid of bed bugs yourself. But, there are things you can do to help keep them from spreading.

- **Extreme heat can kill bed bugs.** Clothing can be treated by heating it to 97-99 degrees. Wash clothing and linen at the highest temperature possible (without damaging them) and then dry them in the "hot" cycle of the clothes dryer for at least 45 minutes. You also can still run them through the dryer's hot cycle if you are not able to wash items in hot temperatures.
- **Keep clean clothes and bedding in sealed plastic bags** to keep the bugs from getting at them again. Also place clothing and linens into unused sealed plastic bags after you have run them through the dryer. Get mattress covers that are made to protect mattresses from bed bugs.
- **Talk to you neighbors once you know you have bed bugs in your unit.** If you live in a multi-unit building or an apartment, it is important to take action immediately to prevent the bed bugs from spreading. Tell the neighbors you found bed bugs in your unit so they



know there is a potential problem for the building. This also will give you the chance to ask your neighbors if they know about current or past bed bug problems in the building or in your unit.

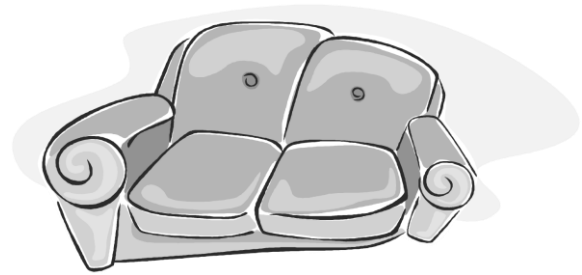
- **Do not pick up furniture that people have thrown away.** Avoid taking items like mattresses and furniture left by dumpsters or put on the curb for trash pick-up. Whoever is throwing them away is doing so for a reason.

If you buy furniture, mattresses or clothing from discount or thrift stores, inspect them carefully for signs of bed bugs before you bring them home.

### **What should I do with my infested furniture?**

Some furniture can be treated for bed bugs by professional exterminators. If the infestation is bad enough it is best to throw it away. **DO NOT** throw away infested furniture where other people can take it. This can make the bugs spread more.

Take the furniture out of your unit in a way that doesn't let the bed bugs spread to other places in the building.



Before throwing out bed bug infested items:

- Break furniture up in pieces. Cut open the mattress, cushions or upholstery, snap the legs off of chairs and couches.
- Broken up furniture should be put in sealed, plastic bags in a dumpster that has a lid and can be locked by the landlord, or picked up by removal services immediately.

You can find more information and resources at:  
[www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/dtopics/pests/bedbugs.html](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/dtopics/pests/bedbugs.html)

Find more fact sheets at [www.lawhelpmn.org/LASMfactsheets](http://www.lawhelpmn.org/LASMfactsheets)  
Find your local legal aid office at [www.lawhelpmn.org/resource/legal-aid-offices](http://www.lawhelpmn.org/resource/legal-aid-offices)

***Fact Sheets are legal information NOT legal advice. See a lawyer for advice.***

*Don't use this fact sheet if it is more than 1 year old. Ask us for updates, a fact sheet list, or alternate formats.*

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