

SLEEP TIGHT

By Keith Petrie, Cal-Rid Exterminators Inc.

Remember when your Mom would tuck you in at night and say “Sleep tight, don’t let the bed bugs bite”. You didn’t really believe they existed, did you? Well, they do exist and they are here in Calgary. Within the last decade, bed bugs have been making a rapid comeback. We are seeing them in homes, apartments, hotels, motels, dormitories, shelters and modes of transport. Unlike cockroaches, the level of cleanliness has little to do with most bed bugs infestations. The cleanest of homes and hotels are as vulnerable as any other.

The adult bed bug is about 1/5 of an inch long, reddish-brown, with an oval flattened body.



Bed bugs are active mainly at night. During the daytime, they prefer to hide close to where people sleep. Their flattened bodies allow them to fit into tiny cracks and crevices, especially in and around mattresses, box springs, bed frames and headboards. Since bed bugs tend to congregate in habitual hiding places, these areas are marked by dark spotting and staining, which is the dried excrement of the bugs. Also present will be the eggs, molted skins and the bugs themselves. Rusty or reddish spots on mattresses, pillows, bed sheets and pillow cases are another sign of bed bugs. When looking for evidence of bed bugs, closets should not be overlooked. The baseboard and door casings should be checked for signs of staining. The bottoms of your luggage should be looked at, especially around the wheels and the zipper. Other areas to watch for staining include on or around electrical outlets, baseboard heaters, behind headboards, night tables, and pictures or mirrors on the wall.



Bed bugs can be brought in on luggage, clothing, used beds, used furniture, etc. Because they are so small, they can easily escape detection after crawling into suitcases or boxes. Once established, they often spread throughout a building. Inspection and treatment of suspected units must be thorough. Units adjacent to the suspect unit should also be inspected. Since access is essential for a successful inspection or treatment, excess clutter should be removed. If mattresses, box springs or couches are heavily infested, they may need to be discarded. Before discarding these items, they should be slashed beyond use so that no one will pick it up and take it home, thus perpetuating the problem. Items should then be wrapped in a heavy-duty poly and taped securely so that bed bugs cannot fall out and infest hallways while being moved out of the problem unit.

If a person chooses to keep the mattress and box spring, or buy new ones, they can also purchase bed bug proof mattress and box spring covers. These encasements are bite proof. When encasing an infested mattress or box spring, the bed bugs cannot bite through the laminate material. Encased bed bugs will succumb to starvation. Encasing a mattress or box spring as a preventative measure will protect the investment. Since the covers are waterproof, the feces and blood spots will not bleed through on to the mattress. Mattress and box springs should be thoroughly vacuumed before encasement.



Bed bugs will venture out from their hiding spots mainly at night. The adult bed bug can cover over 16 feet in 5 minutes in its quest for the host meal. Bed bugs are drawn to the heat and carbon dioxide that we give off. The head and neck are prime feeding sites; however bare arms and legs may also be bitten. In heavy infestations, these bugs may also move into folds of clothing or under sheets to find a feeding site. Once an appropriate feeding site is found, they feed for 2 to 5 minutes until full, and then move quickly away from the host.



All people are not equally sensitive to bed bug bites. Certain skin types may attract bed bugs. While some people may break out in rashes from the bites, as shown in these pictures, others may not show any symptoms at all. Even when two people are sleeping side by side, one may have a severe reaction to the bites while the other has little or no reaction.

Now that you have identified the problem as being bed bugs, what should you do? Call a professional. Do not try to eliminate this problem by yourself. If wrong products or wrong methods are used, the problem can be made worse by spreading the infestation.

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