Intermountain® Healthcare

Bed Bugs

Over the last few years, the number of bed bugs has increased across the United States. The best way to prevent their spread, in a hospital or at home, is to recognize them early and take action right away.

What are bed bugs?

Bed bugs are small, wingless insects that feed at night on the blood of sleeping people. They usually bite areas of skin that are exposed, such as arms, legs, and faces.

Adult bed bugs are about the size of an apple seed and have flat bodies. They often hide in dark places around the bed, such as the seams of mattresses, the crevices of bed frames, and in furniture and curtains. They can live a year or more without eating.

Will bed bugs make me sick?

The good news is that bed bugs are not known to cause or spread disease. Their bites may cause red, itchy welts on the skin. Scratching the bites may cause sores or a skin infection. Some people may have an allergic reaction to the bites. Fear of bed bugs may also cause anxiety or make it difficult to sleep.

How do bed bugs spread?

Bed bugs travel on clothing, in luggage, or in bedding or furniture that's moved from one place to another. Examples may include items such as blankets, car seats, and stuffed animals.

Bed bugs can spread even in a clean environment. Anyone who travels often, or sleeps in a place where other people have slept (such as a hotel), has risk of spreading bed bugs.

Adult bed bugs are about the size of apple seeds.

How can I prevent bed bugs in my home?

These are things you can do to help prevent the spread of bed bugs in your home:

- Use protective covers on your mattresses and box springs. Check them regularly for holes.
- Inspect and thoroughly clean second-hand furniture before bringing it into your home.
- Seal cracks or holes in walls and floors.
- Remove clutter from around beds.
- When traveling, inspect the seams of mattresses and the crevices of bed frames. Keep suitcases off the floor and bed. Inspect suitcases inside and out before leaving. When you get home, unpack directly into the washing machine.

How do I know if I have bed bugs?

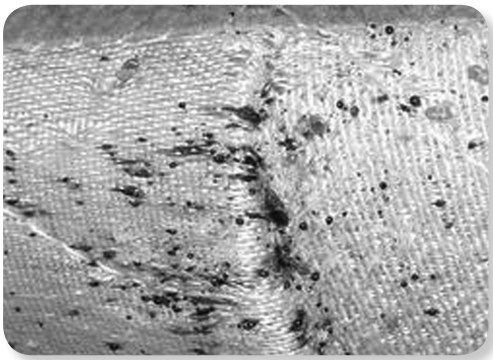
Although you can see bed bugs if they're in front of you, they usually hide in dark places during the day. You can check for bed bugs by looking for:

- Droppings or small blood stains on the sheets
- Bugs or eggs in the seams of mattresses and furniture near beds
- Bite marks on the face, neck, arms, or hands

What should I do if I find bed bugs at home?

If you think you have bed bugs at home, don't panic. It's difficult to get rid of them, but it is possible. Here are some actions you can take:

- **Carefully vacuum infested areas**, especially:
  - Rugs and floors under and around beds
  - Seams, folds, and tags of beds and furniture
  - Bed rails, bed frames, inside and under drawers and dressers, baseboards
  - Cracks and crevices, dark places such as electrical outlets, and behind wall hangings



This is how bed bugs, their skin castings, feces, and eggs may appear on a mattress.

After vacuuming, immediately remove the vacuum bag, seal it in a plastic bag, and throw it in a trash container that's outside.

- **Apply heat.** Wash bedding and clothes regularly in very hot water (over 140° F), and dry them in the hottest cycle of the dryer. Items that can't be washed can be sealed in a dark plastic bag and left in the sun or the trunk of a car on a hot day.
- **Freezing is not the best option.** Freezing can kill bed bugs, but home freezers usually aren't cold enough.
- **Hire a professional pest control service**. Don't use pesticides on your own. Using the wrong pesticide, or using it incorrectly, may make you sick. It may also make the problem worse.
- **Furniture that is infested can usually be treated.** If you throw away anything that's infested, seal it in plastic to prevent the bugs from spreading.

What will happen if bed bugs are found in my hospital room?

Intermountain's goal is to keep all of our facilities bed-bug-free. **At all Intermountain facilities, the rooms and bedding are checked before every new patient.** In the unlikely event that you do see a bug, let your nurses know immediately. They will take action right away.

- Your nurses will regularly check your skin. If bed bugs are suspected or found anywhere in your room, they may ask you to remove all your clothing, shower, and move to another room.
- Your belongings will be inspected and important personal items that don't have bed bugs may be moved with you. Less important items, and anything that has bed bugs, may be sealed in plastic. These items may be given to your family members.

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