

How Can I Get Rid of Bed Bugs?

Bed bugs are small, brownish, flattened insects that feed on human blood.

While bed bugs are most common in places where the occupants change frequently, such as hotels, dormitories and apartments, you or someone you know can bring them into your home on your clothes, in luggage or in used furniture, among other ways. Having them in your home is not an indication of poor housekeeping or lack of cleanliness. While not life-threatening, bed bug infestations can be difficult to get rid of and can negatively affect your quality of life.

Unless an infestation is severe, you may never see the bugs themselves. Signs of bed bugs include stains or dark spots in and around crevices and creases of furniture, or itchy skin welts that result from their bites. If they get into your home, special care must be taken to prevent spreading them to other locations.



Prevent Spreading Bed Bugs

The first and most important step to dealing with bed bugs is to prevent yourself, as well as anyone who comes into your home, from carrying the insects or their eggs to other locations.

- **If you have a case manager**, alert him or her about the bed bug problem. He or she will give you guidance in removing them and can help arrange extermination services, if necessary.
- **If you receive in-home services**, alert your care providers so that they can prepare their workers to prevent spreading the bed bugs to other consumers.
- **If you live in an apartment**, alert the property manager so that he or she can check the entire building.

Removal and Cleaning

To get bed bugs out of your home, first identify and remove potential hiding places.

- **Remove clutter** like boxes, papers and piles of clothing.
- **Remove smaller items** that may be infested, such as picture frames, books and clothing.
- **Place items** that cannot be cleaned into plastic garbage bags, seal them and put them in the outdoor trash.

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Next, clean what you can:

- **Wash bedding**, curtains, rugs and clothes in hot water (120°F minimum) and dry on the highest dryer setting. Soak delicates in warm water with lots of laundry soap for several hours before rinsing. Place wool items, plush toys, shoes and other similar items in a hot dryer for 30 minutes.
- **Vacuum mattresses**, bed frames, furniture, floors and carpets, especially in cracks and open spaces. When finished, vacuum ¼ cup of cornstarch or talcum powder to suffocate any bugs in the vacuum, empty it into a plastic bag, seal it and dispose of it in the outdoor trash.
- **Scrub mattress seams** with a stiff brush to dislodge bed bugs and their eggs. Cover infested mattresses and box springs with waterproof, zippered covers labeled “allergen rated” or “for dust mites” for at least one year.
- **Check pets** and pet bedding as you do other furnishings.

Finally, throw out what you can't clean:

- **Damage items such as furniture and mattresses** to discourage others from taking them into their own homes.
- **Remove loose wallpaper** and repair cracks in the plaster.

Calling in a Professional

A thorough cleaning may not be enough to get rid of bed bugs. Pest control specialists can battle tough infestations with a variety of techniques. Ask your friends and family members for referrals. The specialist should inspect your property and give you a written treatment plan. He or she will tell you what infested items can be effectively cleaned and what should be discarded. He or she also will work with you until the bugs are gone and teach you how to prevent re-infestation.

Ask the professional to:

- **Use the least-toxic pesticide** labeled for bed bugs that will be effective;
- **Follow all instructions** and warnings on product labels;
- **Respond to your questions** about how the treatments will affect pets;
- **Tell you** when it's safe to re-enter a treated room; and
- **Never spray the top of mattresses or sofas**, and if needed, to use only small amounts of pesticides on their seams only.

Agree on a service plan and its costs before work begins. Expect at least two treatments, plus a follow-up visit to confirm that the bugs have been eliminated.