



Frequently Asked Questions by Pet Owners about

Bed Bugs and Pets

Bed bugs are a growing concern in the U.S., and people are realizing that bed bugs aren't only found in filthy environments – they've been found in the nicest homes and hotels, too. After all, bed bugs aren't discriminating – they'll set up home anywhere there are food sources, and those food sources are people and pets.

Bed bugs don't live on people or pets; they live in the environment and *feed* on people and pets by sucking blood.

So, how do we get rid of these unwanted house guests? Unfortunately, there's no silver bullet for getting rid of them. Effective bed bug elimination usually includes vigilant monitoring, prevention, a combination of chemical and non-chemical treatments, and teamwork.

Q: How would I know if I have bed bugs in my house?

A: The first clue might be unexplained, itchy bug bites, but these bites can also resemble other bug bites and the reactions to bed bug bites can vary. Blood spots on your sheets are an early and consistent indication of an infestation. Other signs include visual evidence in the form of actual bugs, molted skins, fecal spots (bed bug poop) or aggregations of all of these.

Bed bugs are sometimes mistaken for ticks or cockroaches. They don't fly, but they can move fast. They are usually active at night and tend to hide close to sleeping areas during the day. They're very efficient hidiers, and can get into very tiny crevices (and you thought your cat was good at hiding!). Adult bed bugs are reddish-brown in color and about the size of an apple seed. Immature bed bugs are smaller, but still visible to the naked eye, and are more translucent white-yellow in color. A bed bug that has just fed on a person or pet is somewhat torpedo-shaped and more reddish in color. Bed bug poop (fecal spots) are small, round, black spots – similar to the “flea dirt” produced by fleas. For more information (including pictures) about identifying bed bugs, view [How to Identify a Bed Bug Infestation](http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/pesticides/pdf/files/bb-identify1.pdf) at <http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/pesticides/pdf/files/bb-identify1.pdf>

Look for evidence of bed bugs in many places, including along mattress seams; behind head boards and on bed frames; in ceiling/wall junctions; along baseboards; in the seams of clothing and other personal belongings such as purses; behind pictures; at electrical outlets; in curtain seams where they gather at the curtain rod; and behind loose wallpaper or chipped paint. Don't forget to check your pet's bedding and stuffed animal toys!

Q: Do bed bugs carry diseases like ticks, fleas or other pests?

A: They're annoying and their bites can cause skin irritation and itching that, if severe, might require some minor treatment, but the good news is that bed bugs aren't known to transmit disease. However, bed bugs are pests of significant public health importance and can cause a variety of negative physical health, mental health and financial consequences.

Q: Can my pet carry bed bugs?

A: Bed bugs don't live on pets or spend as much time on your pet as the more common pests (such as fleas, ticks, lice and mites), but they can bite your pets. We also know that bed bugs are very efficient hitchhikers and can be transported to your home via luggage, clothing, bedding, furniture, etc., so it's possible that bed bugs could also hitchhike in your pet's fur or its bedding or clothing.

Q: I think I've got bed bugs in my house. What do I do?

A: First, contact a professional pest management service, and let the professionals inspect your house and work with you to develop a plan to get rid of your infestation. Keep in mind that it's likely to involve more than one visit – these are tough bugs! “Bug bombs” purchased at the local store will not work against bed bugs.

Tell the pest service that you have pets and you need them to use a product that is as safe as possible for your family and your pets.

Whenever a pesticide is used, always [read and follow label directions](#) for any pesticide product. Check the label to make sure it's labeled for use on bed bugs. Any EPA-approved pesticide product should have an EPA Registration number on it. Make sure the pesticide has been approved for indoor use.

Q: I've contacted a pest service to treat my house. What should I do with my pet if I'm worried it's also affected by the bed bugs?

A: In most cases, you won't need to throw out your pet's bedding, clothing or stuffed toys. Here are a few tips for you, based on what we know at this time:

- Launder your pet's bedding in the hottest temperature settings (minimum 120 degrees Fahrenheit in the wash water, and the medium/high or high setting on the dryer). Be careful when transporting the bedding to the laundry and sorting it so you avoid further spreading the bed bugs.
- If the materials (bedding, clothing, etc.) cannot be washed, but can be put in a dryer, put them in the dryer at medium to high heat for 10-20 minutes.
- If the bedding or clothing has tears or holes, consider getting rid of it altogether. Put them in a plastic bag, seal it, and mark it with an obvious sign that it's infested with bugs.

Q: Are flea and tick preventives effective against bed bugs?

A: Only products labeled with bed bugs as a target pest should be used. If bed bugs are not listed on the label, the product may not be effective. And unlike fleas and ticks, bed bugs live in your home, not on your pet. Using the wrong pesticide or using it incorrectly to treat for bed bugs can make you, your family, and your pet sick. The EPA has a [search tool](#) to help you find the right product.

Q: What can I do to prevent bed bugs?

A: There are many good resources to help you prevent bed bug infestations, and they're listed in the resources section below.

This document was produced as a joint outreach effort of the AVMA Communications and Scientific Activities Divisions.

Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) resources

- [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) bed bug resources](#)

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) resources

- [EPA Bed Bug resources](#)
- [EPA-Registered Bed Bug Products](#) (search tool)
- [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: Citizen's Guide to Pest Control and Pesticide Safety](#)
- [Second National Bedbug Summit website](#) (February 2010)

National Center for Healthy Housing

- [National Center for Healthy Housing: What's Working for Bed Bug Control in Multifamily Housing](#) (Feb 2010)
- [National Center for Healthy Housing: Integrated Pest Management in Affordable Housing](#)

National Pesticide Information Center

- [National Pesticide Information Center: Understanding and Controlling Bed Bugs](#)

Additional resources

- [National Pest Management Association, Inc.: The Bed Bug Hub : One-Stop Shop for Bed Bug Information](#)
- [New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Preventing and Getting Rid of Bed Bugs Safely \(also available in Spanish\)](#)
- [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development: Guidance on Integrated Pest Management](#)
- [University of Kentucky College of Agriculture: Bed Bugs](#)
- Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services: [Bed Bug Outreach and Education Program](#)
- Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services: [How to Identify a Bed Bug Infestation \(also available in Spanish\)](#)

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