

Bed Bugs in Wisconsin

Questions and Answers

Are bed bugs found in WI?

Yes, bed bugs are found throughout Wisconsin. You should not be surprised if you find or learn about bed bugs in your community. Bed bugs can be found in private homes, hotels, resorts, apartment complexes and communal living facilities.

What are bed bugs and what do they look like?

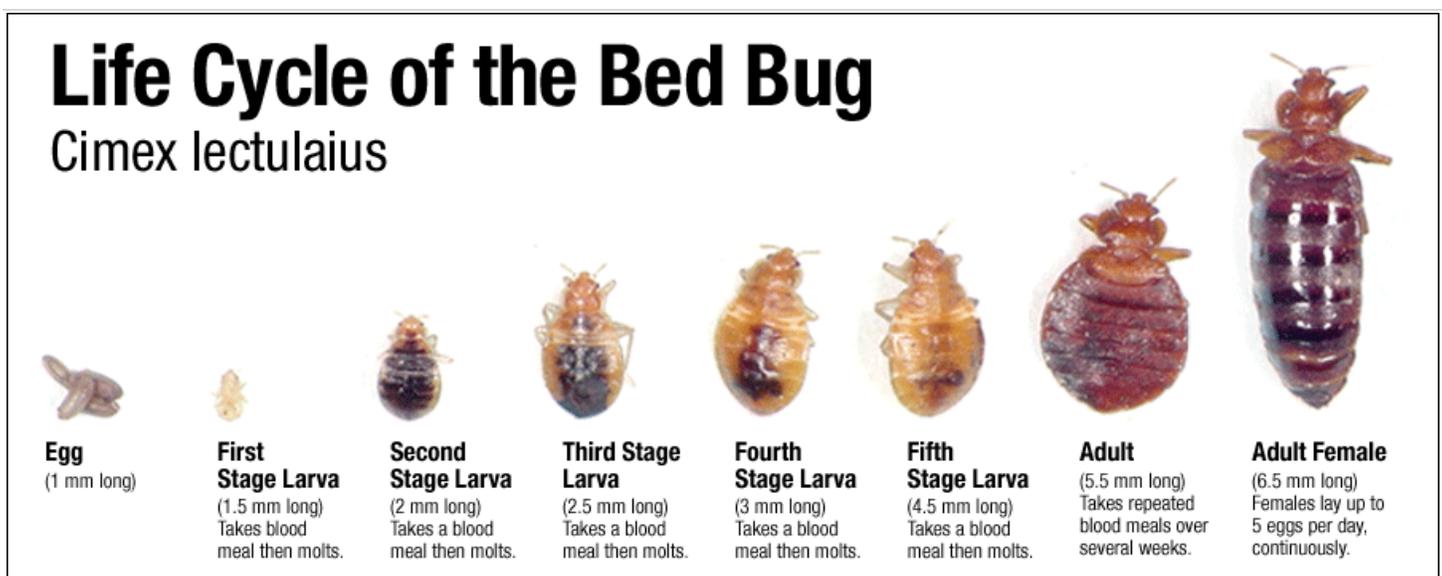
Bed bugs (*Cimex lectularis*) are small, flat, wingless insects that feed on human and animal blood usually during the night. They are often reddish brown in color. Adult insects can be ¼ inch in length and have a shape similar to an apple seed. Nymph stages (early life stages) of this insect are roughly the same size as the small lettering on a penny.

Where do bed bugs live?

Bed bugs are most often found in areas where people live and sleep. Homes, apartments and hotel rooms are common locations in which bed bugs are found. Often they are found within 8 to 10 feet of a bed. They are experts at hiding and staying hidden. The cracks and crevices of head boards, mattresses, box springs and night stands serve as hiding places for bed bugs. Bed bug infestations are not necessarily the result of poor sanitary conditions; however, eliminating clutter will provide less area for hiding and will make treatment more successful.

How do bed bugs spread?

Bed bugs are easily introduced into a home or a residential facility. This introduction is done by bringing infested luggage, used furniture, clothing or other belongings from an infested area into a home or residential facility. Bed bugs can also travel from infested rooms or units in hotels and apartments to other rooms or units for a blood meal and they can survive for a long period of time without a blood meal.



What are the health concerns associated with bed bug bites?

Bed bugs bite people to feed on their blood. They are not known to spread diseases. Individuals will react differently to the bites and the reaction can range from a mild itching to a serious allergic reaction. Most people will have a small, itchy, red welt that appears one to several days after the initial bite and is similar to that of a mosquito bite. Secondary infections may occur from scratching the bite and may need medical attention. Anxiety and insomnia are additional health concerns associated with bed bug bites. Anxiety has led people to take extreme treatment measures to get rid of the bed bugs.

How do I know if I have a bed bug infestation?

The evidence you may find includes; finding bed bug bite marks on your body, finding live bed bugs on your sheets and/or mattress, bed bug shed skins (cast skins left when the insect advances to the next nymph stage), their fecal blood stains (dark colored spots left on sheets, mattresses, head boards) and possibly eggs.

What treatments are used to get rid of bed bugs?

Bed bugs are difficult pests to eliminate. Public awareness is an important part of controlling this insect. It is recommended that you use a professional pest control company to control an infestation. Professional pest control companies use a combination of treatment techniques to control the insects. These techniques may include:

- Heat treatment—heating a room and its contents to above 120 degrees Fahrenheit. This is done through the use of a specially designed and approved heating device.
- Chemical treatment—pest control companies will apply approved chemicals according to the manufacturer's instructions (specifically labeled for indoor use and designed to kill bed bugs) in cracks and crevices where bed bugs hide.
- Steam treatment—mattresses, box springs and furniture can be treated with a steam producing device. The high temperatures will kill the bed bugs
- Vacuuming—a vacuum is used to physically remove insects from infested areas.
- Bed bug trained dog—Using a bed bug dog team consisting of a trained dog and trained handler to locate bed bugs and clear a room for use.



Bed bugs and fecal blood stains on a mattress.
Photo by Phil Pellitteri, UW Madison Insect Diagnostic Lab

Treatment techniques to avoid:

- Do not misuse treatment chemicals. Direct application of chemicals to the skin and excessive chemical applications to mattresses have been responsible for chemical poisonings across the country. Manufacturer instructions must be followed.
- Do not apply chemicals labeled for *outdoor* use inside your home.
- Do not apply chemicals that are not labeled and approved for use on bed bugs.
- Do not use unvented fuel burning appliances (propane or kerosene heaters) inside your home to heat rooms.

How can I protect myself while I am traveling?

You can protect yourself from bed bugs when traveling by taking several precautions:

- Discussing what actions a hotel is taking to prevent bed bug infestations. Assure they have a plan to deal with infestations and are monitoring rooms.
- Checking the mattress, box spring, head board and other furniture within 8 to 10 feet of the bed for insects, shed skins and fecal blood stains.
- When you first walk into a hotel room, store your luggage and belongings in the bathroom or bath tub until you have found no evidence of infestation in your room.
- Placing your clothing in a dryer on the hottest setting (above 120 F) for at least twenty minutes.
- Carefully inspect your luggage and belongings for the insects or their eggs prior to returning to your home.

Who do I contact if I find an infestation?

Hotels- inform the hotel manager or housekeeping of the infestation and contact the local health department if you wish to file a complaint.

Apartments- inform your apartment manager and contact the local health department if you wish to file a complaint.

Homes- contact a professional pest control company.

Informational Links

- CDC information on bed bugs: <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/bedbugs/>
- Pest Control information: <http://www.pestworld.org/all-things-bed-bugs/>
- EPA Bed Bug Clearinghouse: <http://www.epa.gov/opp00001/bedbugs/bedbug-clearinghouse.html>
- Wisconsin Pest Control Association: <http://wisconsinpest.com/>
- Michigan Manual for Prevention and Control of Bed Bugs
http://michigan.gov/documents/emergingdiseases/Bed_Bug_Manual_v1_full_reduce_326605_7.pdf



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