

Homeowner Fact Sheet Series

By Michael R. Bush, Ph.D.

Human Bed Bug

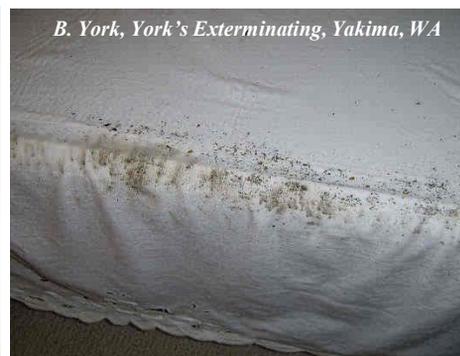
Family: Cimicidae
Cimex lectularius



Human bed bugs have been found in households throughout Washington with increasing frequency. The size of the bug ranges from the 1/16" nymph to 1/4" adult.



Adult bed bugs are reddish brown, wingless, oval shaped bugs that are paper thin and will hide in cracks, crevices, bedding folds and luggage. Bedbugs have piercing-sucking mouthparts that allows them to puncture human skin and take blood meals.



Bed bugs feed on humans and animals at night and their feeding causes skin welts, local inflammation and discomfort. Their presence can be confirmed by examining mattress seams, bed frames and springs for the presence of blood spots, shed skins or bed bugs.

Human Bed Bug

The human bed bug, *Cimex lectularius*, is the most common species of bed bug to plague humans.

The saying “Sleep tight; don’t let the bed bugs bite” is not just a quaint bedtime rhyme, but a reminder of a problem that is on the rise in today’s highly mobile society. Human bed bugs require blood meals to provide for their offspring. Bed bugs are household pests that feed on humans at night and hide during the day in bedding and furniture in the vicinity of sleeping areas. Bed bugs are not known to transmit human diseases, but their feeding can cause skin welts, local inflammation and discomfort.

Life History:

- Adults: While human bed bugs are wingless, they are able to move from household to household by hitching rides in luggage, baggage, clothing and bedding material.
- Eggs: After mating and a blood meal, the adult female will begin to deposit eggs that are 1/16 inch long, sticky, rice-shaped in cracks, crevices and rough wooded surfaces in proximity (within a couple feet) to human sleeping areas.
- Immature: Looks identical to the adults except smaller and lighter brown in color. Both the immature and adult bed bugs can both survive for months without feeding.
- Adult bed bugs can live up to 10 months and there can be 3 to 4 generations per year.

Management:

- Avoid introducing bed bugs into your home in the first place. Homeowners should not acquire second-hand bed mattresses or upholstered furniture without first quarantining it for several months to determine that it is free of bed bugs. Second hand clothing or bedding should be washed ASAP or dry-cleaned before they are brought into the household. As a final precaution, when returning from overnight trips, all travel clothing should be washed immediately, articles quarantined before moving them into the household and luggage stored away from residential sleeping areas (or quarantined).
- Once established in a household, bed bugs are difficult to eliminate without the services of professional exterminators. Furthermore, exterminators can not eliminate bed bugs from a household without full cooperation of the homeowner in cleaning, removing infested materials, reducing clutter and maintaining utmost cleanliness in these sleeping areas.
- The primary tactic is to remove or replace any infested furniture including mattresses, box springs, couches, and upholstered chairs. Cleaning, washing and vacuuming the furniture and bedding material regularly can reduce bed bug infestations. Freshly-laundered bed linens, draperies and clothing should be stored in sealed plastic bags to prevent re-infestation.
- Create a barrier between the bed and the infested area can reduce the incidence of bites. Do not allow the mattress/springs to contact the wall and do not allow bedding to contact the floor. Placing the foot of bedposts in coasters of soapy water or on sticky cards can prevent bed bugs access to the bed. Plastic mattress liners that enclose and seal the mattress will work.
- Homeowners can obtain pesticides (including cyfluthrin or permethrin) labeled for indoor use. These products need to be directed to where the bugs hide including floorboards, moldings, under wallpaper, under carpeting, wall sockets, picture frames, and even furniture. Home-owners may be better served to hire professional applicators who can properly, safely, and effectively apply these products.
- It may be necessary to inspect and treat sleeping areas in adjacent rooms or apartments.