

NEWS RELEASE
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Bedbugs-How to Identify and Prevent Bedbugs
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*Figure 1- Bedbug*

Louisburg, N.C. – Bedbugs have become a common problem across the country with infestations showing up in residences, hotels, college campuses and other places. Experts have speculated that the increase in bedbug infestations is likely due to a number of factors such as increased travel and tourism, changes in tactics used for controlling pests such as cockroaches, and an increasing resistance by bedbugs to the most commonly used insecticides.

How does a bedbug look? Adult bedbugs are reddish-brown, oval, flattened insects about 3/16" long and up to 1/8" wide (Figure 1). Engorged (blood-fed) adults are swollen and dull red. Though wingless, adult bedbugs do have small wing pads. The dark-colored eyes stand out and the sides of the collar-like pronotum curve slightly around the head and is covered with long hairs. Newly hatched nymphs are almost colorless whereas engorged (blood-fed) nymphs are reddish and swollen. Bedbug eggs are white, oval eggs about 1 mm long.

Habits & Life Cycle

Humans are the preferred host for bedbugs, but they also feed on many warm-blooded animals including rats, mice, dogs, cats, poultry, and other birds. Bats, swallows, and chimney swifts may serve as hosts and may be responsible for causing infestations in or around buildings but they are more typically fed upon by other species in those situations.

Currently, there is not any scientifically-based evidence showing that bedbugs transmit diseases. Bedbugs do not bore into the skin. They insert their mouthparts into the host's skin and suck out blood. As bedbugs feed, they inject saliva which may produce an allergic reaction that often causes slightly delayed swelling, itching, and irritation that can persist for a week or more. Large infestations of bedbugs may have a noticeable "sweet" odor.

Bedbugs can feed and breed year-round under favorable conditions. They typically hide during the day in mattresses or cracks and crevices. Under favorable conditions, each female lays 200 to 500 eggs. Maximum egg laying occurs when the temperature is above 70°F (21°C). Eggs are typically not deposited when temperatures drop below 50°F (10°C). Bedbugs cannot fly or jump and do not normally crawl long distances. Their primary means of dispersal is through human activity, i.e. people move them from one place to another in luggage, laundry, etc. Animals, particularly birds and bats, may be involved in bed/bat bug dispersal.

How to Eliminate Bedbugs

1) Confirm that you do have bedbugs. It is very important to note that a bedbug problem **cannot** be reliably identified solely on the basis of welts or other seemingly insect-related bite marks. It is critical to find actual evidence of the bedbugs: actual insects, shed skins, fecal spots, etc.

2) Locate all of their hiding places. Furniture, particularly bedroom furniture must be inspected carefully. Bedbugs may crawl 1-20 feet. Pull out dresser drawers, check nightstands and obvious cracks and crevices.

3) Chemical Control. There are many products available for bedbug control. If you choose to try to eliminate bedbugs yourself by using chemical products sold, be sure to **READ THE PRODUCT LABEL TO MAKE SURE YOU UNDERSTAND HOW THE PRODUCT WORKS.** You can also contact a pest control service to take care of this issue.

Protect Yourself from Infestations

Any property can become home to these hitchhiking pests. The key is to be attentive and prevent the problem from becoming worse. Here are some measures you can take to reduce the likelihood of a problem:

- Check your room carefully.
- Keep luggage off the floor and check the shelves before placing luggage on them. You can keep your luggage in a trash bag during your stay.
- Upon returning home, empty your luggage on a sheet so you can check items carefully, then wash and dry sheet.
- Be careful about furniture and other items picked up at yard sales.

If you have any questions or concerns about bedbugs feel free to contact Franklin County NC Cooperative Extension, 919-496-3344.

Information in this article was obtained from NC State Extension Publications; Bedbugs – Biology and Control