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SUMMARY

Bed bugs have undergone a resurgence in our society. Correctly identifying an infestation is the first step in control. Most people will likely want to hire a professional service to control them.

Managing Bed Bugs

by Emma Connery, UC Master Gardener Program Coordinator

Bed bugs are back! And, they are buggers to manage!

Q: I am getting bitten by something and I think it's happening inside my house. I get these welts and they itch. I don't have pets so it is not fleas. I feel like I am going crazy. Any idea what it could be?

A: It is very possible that you have bed bugs. Bed bugs are blood-sucking insects in the family Cimicidae. Both adults and nymphs feed on humans mostly at night and people are not aware they have been bitten until afterwards when welts may appear. Distinguishing bed bug bites from the bites of mosquitoes, fleas, and spiders is difficult. The only way you really can confirm bed bugs are the cause is to find the bugs in your bed or bedroom.

During the day they hide in crevices. More than 85% of bed bugs are found in or near the bed, so inspections for infestations should focus on the mattress, including the seams, box springs, bed frame, and headboard areas. Other hiding places include under loose wallpaper, behind picture frames, and inside furniture and upholstery.

Identifying Bed Bugs:

The eggs are white and very small and will require magnification to see. Once the eggs hatch there are five progressively larger nymphal stages before reaching adulthood. Adult are oval, wingless, about 1/5 inch long, and rusty red or mahogany - they look very similar to an apple seed. They leave unsightly, roughly round fecal spots on bed sheets and around their hiding places. The fecal spots can be very small and because they feed on blood they are darkish red in color.

Reasons for Resurgence:

Incidences of bed bugs have increased exponentially in recent years and can now be found in the finest hotels and living accommodations. The reasons for the resurgence are not totally understood but appear to involve increased human travel, ease of movement of infested luggage and furniture, and changes in the pesticides available to control this pest.

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Managing an Infestation:

Managing a bed bug infestation is a difficult task and may require hiring a professional pest control company. When you contact a pest control company be sure to ask them their experience and process specific to bed bugs. The University of California has two publications that you will find helpful in managing an infestation. They are free, and you can download them from the UC IPM website.

Bed Bugs

<http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PDF/PESTNOTES/pnbedbugs.pdf>

Hiring a Pest Control Company

<http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PDF/PESTNOTES/pnhirepestcontrol.pdf>

You can find additional bed bug information on the Contra Costa Health Department website http://cchealth.org/topics/bed_bugs/.

Multi-Unit Considerations:

If you are living in a multiple unit housing situation, then bed bug management becomes complex because the situation might require inspection and treatment of neighboring units to assure the infestation is eliminated. If you own a townhouse or condominium you should inform the owners of the adjoining units so they can be part of the inspection and treatment process. If you rent an apartment, townhouse, or condominium the property owner/manger has the responsibility to maintain the unit and you will need to report the situation to them.