

I Have Bed Bugs, Now What?

KEY POINTS:

Bed bugs are best handled by a professional

Physical methods such as vacuuming or hot laundering can be helpful

Vacuums that are used to remove bed bugs can become infested

Beds do not have to be thrown out, they can be saved by using an appropriate mattress & box spring encasement

Sleeping in a different room or vacating the structure is not a solution and can make the problem more difficult to eliminate

1. **Contact a professional:**

The complete elimination of bed bugs requires highly trained and licensed individuals knowledgeable in bed bug biology, behavior, and the proper use of pesticides. There is little chance that you will be able to eliminate the problem on your own. Most commercially available pesticides are not designed for bed bugs and the use of these products (while they may kill some bed bugs) may only spread the bed bugs to remote areas and make the problem much more difficult to solve. While chemical remedies should only be handled by professionals, there are many non-chemical measures you can take to help eliminate the problem and speed up the results of your bed bug program. These techniques are discussed below.

2. **Remove bed bugs**

Just because you have bed bugs does not mean that you have to wait for a professional to kill them. You can simply crush them with a rag (although this may stain surfaces) or remove them with a vacuum. Regularly inspecting and vacuuming your mattress and box spring is a very effective way to reduce large numbers of bed bugs quickly. However, it is important to note that bed bugs can readily infest vacuums. To reduce the likelihood of the vacuum becoming infested you should choose a vacuum that empties into a vacuum bag instead of a filter. A vacuum bag can be easily disposed of while a filter is difficult to completely empty and eggs can easily lodge in places that you cannot see. Also, avoid using vacuum attachments that have brushes or bristles. Instead use the open end of the hose. Vacuuming up a little bit of talcum/baby powder before you start vacuuming and just after you finish may also help reduce the survival rate of some of the bugs that are vacuumed up. As soon as you are done vacuuming, the vacuum bag should be tied shut in a trash bag and discarded outside of the home. You should also inspect the housing of the vacuum where the bag attaches to the hose as some bugs may escape the vacuum bag. If you have a bagless vacuum, the contents of the canister should be emptied into a trash bag and tied shut. The canister should then be washed to remove any remaining bed bugs or eggs. If you are concerned about the vacuum becoming infested then you should not follow this recommendation.

3. **Eliminate clutter**

Clutter is a bed bug's best friend and a pest management professional's worst enemy. Clutter provides an infinite number of areas for bed bugs to hide and creates areas that cannot be effectively treated by your pest management professional. These areas are a safe haven for bed bugs. Cluttered areas can cause the complete failure of a bed bug control program. If cluttered conditions persist, your pest management professional may only be able to reduce the number of bed bugs and never completely eliminate the problem. Do your best to eliminate clutter.



Example of clutter in a room, unlimited areas for bugs to hide and lay eggs

4. **Do not store items under bed**

Related to #3, items stored under the bed give bed bugs additional undisturbed areas to hide protected from any chemical treatments.



Items left beneath an infested bed are a recipe for control failure

5. **Launder items regularly**

Heat is deadly to bed bug. All stages of bed bugs including the eggs can be killed by exposing them to temperatures in excess of 120oF for at least twenty minutes. Hot laundering can be a highly effective method for dealing with any item that can be safely placed in a clothes dryer on high heat. Research has also indicated that if your dryer has standard temperature settings, even a low dry cycle will achieve temperatures high enough to kill bed bugs and their eggs. Linens should be laundered regularly (preferably weekly) in hot water and dried in the hot cycle of your dryer to kill any bed bugs or eggs on the items. Even if you do not see any bed bugs on the items, female bed bugs drop eggs randomly as they roam. These eggs are very tiny and will not be noticed on your linens. Washing the linens will remove and kill these eggs. Likewise, if your couch is infested, you can also remove the cushion covers (if possible) and launder them as well. Please be aware that bed bugs were demonstrated to be able to survive a cold wash cycle even with detergent present.

6. **Install mattress and box spring encasements**

There are many mattress and box spring encasements available to the consumer; however most of these encasements have not been designed specifically for use with bed bugs. Instead most encasements available to the consumer are designed to either protect the bed from becoming stained or provide relief for people with allergies to dust mites. This does not mean that they will be effective for bed bugs. It is very important to be sure that the encasement that you purchase has been specifically designed for bed bugs and has scientific data to support the effectiveness of the product.

Once beds are encased any bugs that may be trapped within the encasement will be unable to escape or feed and will eventually die. In addition, once the beds are protected, other bed bugs cannot penetrate the encasement and thus cannot infest the mattress or box spring. Instead, bed bugs are restricted to the surface of the encasement where they are easy to spot and remove. In addition to playing an important role in managing a bed bug infestation, encasements can also be a very useful pro-active tool to help aid in the early detection of bed bugs should they be introduced into a dwelling that was not previously infested. Finally, it is important that the encasements are kept in good condition. Any rips in the encasements will allow bed bugs to enter and exit the encasement. (See Also - [Mattress and Box Spring Encasements](#))



Close-Up of Mattress and Box Spring Encasement



Fully Installed Mattress and Box Spring Encasement

7. **Do not change where you sleep**

Some people believe that they can avoid bed bugs by sleeping in a different area of their home. Once people identify that their bed is infested they will often begin sleeping in a different bedroom or on the sofa. Bed bugs have evolved over millions of years to be very adept at locating potential hosts to feed on. If you move to a different area of the home to sleep, the bed bugs will find you. Changing where you sleep is likely to promote the movement of bugs throughout the structure and make it more difficult to eliminate the infestation. Even if you move out of your home, you risk bringing bed bugs with you to your temporary residence and infesting that area as well. Not only can you spread the bed bugs, but when you return home the bugs will be waiting to greet you. Remember, bed bugs can survive many months, and in some cases up to a year or more without feeding. Although it sounds like a grim choice, it is best to continue sleeping in the infested area until the bed bugs are eliminated.

8. **Do not immediately throw items away**

For many people, the immediate reaction to a bed bug infestation is to throw the infested items away. This is unnecessary and could possibly make the problem worse. As items are carried through the home to be discarded, bed bugs can fall off of the item and be spread throughout the home to uninfested areas. Also, you are eliminating the harborages for these bed bugs and disturbing them. This may cause the bed bugs to move to find other places to live and spread the problem. In addition, discarded items are often picked up by other people (maybe even your neighbor), spreading the problem to new areas. In some circumstances when the item is in poor condition or is highly infested, discarding the item is the best option. However, this is best left to a professional so that the item can be discarded properly without spreading the problem.



Infested beds are often discarded without destroying them or sealing them in a plastic or other protective encasing. The end result is that bugs and eggs may be distributed along the path out of the dwelling as they are removed. Infested beds left outside in hallways, by dumpsters or curbside may be picked up by an unsuspecting party spreading the problem to a new location.