

Hot Topics

IN ALASKA NATIVE HEALTH

Special Edition, Spring 2014

BEDBUGS: UNWANTED VISITORS

Mosquitos are usually known as Alaska's most annoying insect, but another blood-sucking insect is becoming a real pest for Alaskans – bedbugs. Bedbugs live and thrive in areas where humans spend a lot of time – on our mattresses, furniture, blankets and carpets. Bedbug bites can be itchy, but thankfully they are not known to transmit or spread disease.

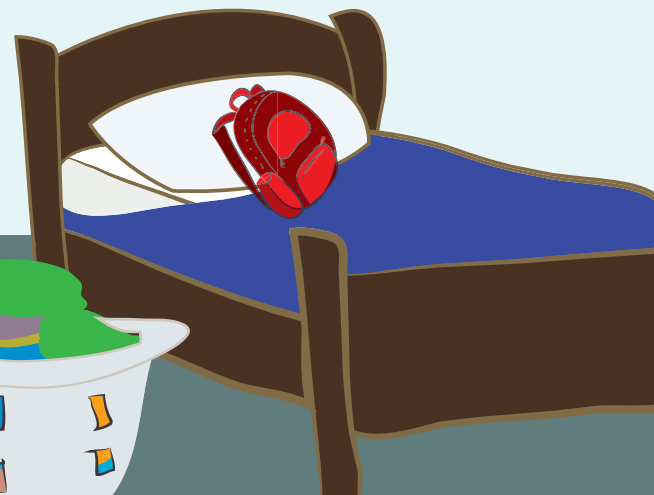
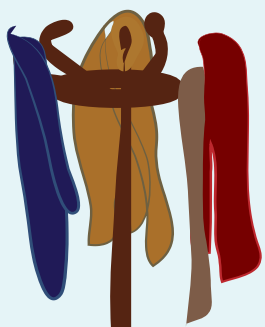
Unlike those flying, buzzing mosquitos, bedbugs are very small and wingless, making them difficult to see, control and prevent. Bedbugs live in and on belongings that are close to people for prolonged periods, most often within a few feet of where people sleep, but they do not live on our bodies. They feed quickly and return to their hiding places. Most are about a quarter-of-an-inch long, oval and very flat and reddish-brown in color.

There is sometimes a shame that comes along with bedbugs, but you and your home can be perfectly clean and still have bedbugs. Bedbugs feed only on blood, so they are not attracted by crumbs or dust. Friends can unknowingly bring them into your home on their clothing or luggage, or bedbugs can even travel on your clothing and belongings if you visit a place that is infected. Bringing used mattresses, box springs, or other furniture into your home is also a common way for bedbugs to spread. Because bedbugs are small and can move through tiny cracks, they can sometimes move from bedroom to bedroom in a house, apartment or hotel in search of a meal.

While there is no guaranteed way to prevent bedbugs from entering your home, there are many precautions you can take to minimize your exposure. And if your home becomes infested, bedbugs can be effectively removed with the proper steps taken by experts.

Don't let the bedbugs bite or spread! Follow the tips on the next page to prevent bedbugs from entering or taking over your home.

Bedbugs aren't just found in beds. In fact, they can live in many places in a home (beds, carpets, clothing, upholstered furniture and more), and they can travel into a home in many ways, as well (on clothing, accessories, laundry, luggage and more).



I have bedbugs – Now what?



1. Do not panic! Catch one of the bugs and save it in a small plastic bag or jar for identification by an expert to ensure it is a bedbug.

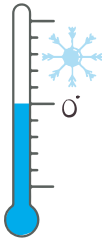
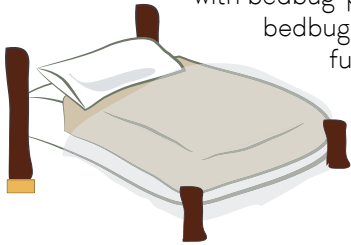


2. Contact a licensed pest control operator, your landlord (if you rent) or your local Tribal health organization's Office of Environmental Health.

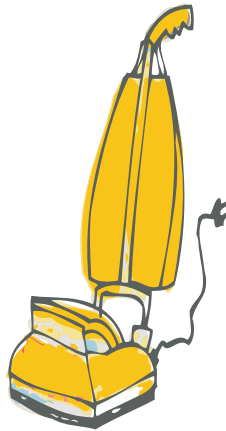
3. Cover mattress and box spring with bedbug-proof wrapping, place bedbug traps under your bed and furniture legs.



4. Put clothing in a dryer on high heat for 30 minutes to kill the bugs.



5. In the winter, put items out in the cold – at least four days in below-zero or colder temperatures.



6. Clean your home thoroughly – vacuum often and seal the vacuum bag before throwing it away; minimize clutter, especially near where you sleep, to reduce places for bedbugs to hide.



7. Only use pesticides as a last resort; if you do use pesticides, be sure they are Environmental Protection Agency registered and use the least toxic product available. People have made themselves and their families sick trying to rid their houses of bedbugs with unsafe chemicals.

How to prevent the spread of bedbugs and keep them out of your home

When you travel ...

- ... inspect mattress seams, headboards and upholstered furniture
- ... store your luggage, clothing and bags in a bathroom or on luggage racks
- ... if you are concerned your room has a bedbug problem, ask to switch rooms
- ... and return home, unpack your clothing directly into the washing machine and inspect your luggage for signs of bedbugs

When inspecting areas or buying used items ...

- ... look for live bugs or their eggs and eggshells, which are tiny, white skins that are shed
- ... look for dark spots on items, which could be bedbug feces, or rusty/reddish stains

If bedbugs are spotted in your workplace or community washeteria ...

- ... inspect the area to make sure you don't sit near any bugs or place your laundry on them
- ... keep your personal belongings and laundry baskets off the floor
- ... seal your clothing in a plastic bag or keep it in a plastic basket, or if you use a cloth laundry bag, wash it every time
- ... put your clothes in the dryer on high heat for 30 minutes to kill any bugs



Learn more about bedbugs at www.epa.gov/bedbugs. Have questions about bedbugs in Alaska? Contact your region's Tribal health organization or the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium's Environmental Health Support team at (907) 729-3600.

