

FAQ: Think you have bed bugs? Some dos and don'ts

If you think you have bed bugs, these are the essential dos and don'ts.

If you suspect there are bed bugs where you sleep, **don't begin sleeping in another bed, on the sofa. Do not go to stay with someone else.** The bugs may follow you to your guest room or sofa, and then it will be much harder to get rid of them. They may hitch a ride to your relative's home, and you can cause them to become infested. (All of these situations have happened to Bedbuggers we know.) Also, staying outside of your home means the bugs may become dormant. We're told they may live without feeding for up to 18 months. When you come back, they can begin biting you again. So staying in your home during treatment, and sleeping in your usual bed, is the way to kill bed bugs. Isolate your bed, and sleep there while you're getting a Pest Control Operator (PCO) to treat your home. Once you are being treated, you must remain in the bed—you are the bait, attracting bugs to the poison and their deaths. If you isolate the bed, they need not bite you.

Do save any bed bugs you find. Do not part with these— you may need to show them to pest control professionals. Entomologists at colleges or science museums in your town may identify these, and a pest control company can too. Pick it up with clear packing tape, and tape it to an index card. Don't assume you'll see lots of them, some people don't.

Do rule out other possible conditions, like folliculitis, scabies, and bites from other insects. . Be warned, though, that many of us are told by doctors that we do not have bed bugs, and later find they are wrong. Many of them have never seen bed bug bites, or have seen only some patients with them. Bites can range from large welts to small red bumps, to scabby pimple-type bumps. See the photos in the left sidebar links on the blog (even Caryn's bites look different on different areas of her body).

Don't start throwing your bed and other furniture out. Cover and isolate the bed. (You may wish to wait until a PCO has started treating before covering the mattress in an encasement.) Most furniture, including mattresses and sofas, can be treated by a PCO, and you can ask the PCO if throwing them out is a good idea. And he or she can help you do it safely, so as not to spread the bugs around your home or building, and so that others do not pick up infested items.

Don't start buying a load of chemicals and treating yourself. Choose a good PCO and about why doing your own pest control in lieu of a PCO is not a good idea. Yes, sometimes supplementing a PCO's work makes sense, but only if you know what they're doing, and what you should do. Remember, pesticides have different qualities (repellents, contact killers, residual killers, growth regulators, etc.) Bed bugs are probably the most complicated pests you've ever encountered at home. If you start spraying pesticides, you may disperse the bugs, and the professionals may have trouble treating them. You may spread them around your home. Get good professional help and follow instructions.

Do not, absolutely do not release a fogger or bug bomb. Do not allow your landlord to do so. Do not allow a so-called exterminator to do so. Bug bombs / foggers do not work for bed bugs, and in fact, will spread them. Your problem will be magnified. Trust me!

Don't start bagging *everything* you own. With the exception of washed and dried clothing (according to specific instructions), do not seal up everything you own in bags. Some PCOs will want you to inspect, vacuum, and seal all your possessions in bags. Most won't. Following their advice is crucial, since *they* know what they're using on your problem. If you decide to bag things, you may be sealing away bed bugs— and this is only a way of dealing with the problem if you put these items in storage for 18 months, unopened. Instead, most PCOs will vigorously fight your problem, and bed bugs will be attracted out of your possessions and towards poisons which will kill them.

Do start dealing with your clothing and linens. Though you should not simply seal your possessions in bags (as above), it is probably a good idea to start working on clothing and bedding, since the PCO is going to tell you to do this, and it takes time. You should take clothing and other items, wash them in a machine on hot, dry them on hot for 1-2 hours. Remember, driers vary as to their strength and how long they take with what size of load. My personal method is that items should at least be dried on hot for 20 minutes *after they appear to be fully dry and very hot*. If you want to be cautious, go for two hours on hot. Dry cleaning is okay too. Keep in mind that pillows, comforters, down coats, and other thick items may take longer. Here's the key: after washing and drying, bag items in sealed, airtight bags, and do not remove them until use.

Don't assume bed bugs are only in your bed. While bed frames and mattresses and headboards are the most likely location for bed bugs, they can and do often hide out in sofas and other soft furniture, electrical sockets (behind plates), light fixtures, baseboards, floor crevices, and other crevices in the bedroom and living room. Bed bugs are occasionally found in kitchens and bathrooms. This should not make you panic: most cases, especially smaller ones, are quite concentrated, usually 10-20 feet from where people sleep (or where they sit for extended periods). However, if a PCO tells you bed bugs are not found in living rooms, realize that many Bedbuggers have infested sofas, computer chairs, and so on. **Don't believe that bed bugs only bite at night.** They prefer a sleeping, stationary host who is fast asleep. But if they're hungry, they'll take what they can get. You can be bitten while in a chair, awake.

Once you get a PCO treating your place, **don't assume this will be solved overnight.** If your PCO treats and you are still being bitten, this is normal. The bites should decrease and eventually disappear. If you see bed bugs or are bitten, **do have another treatment within 10-14 days of the first. Do insist the PCO repeat treatment every two weeks until you feel no more bites, and see no live bedbugs or new signs of bed bugs (like bed bug feces stains in the bed). Do not assume you have a bad PCO because it takes three or four treatments to solve your problem.** This, unfortunately, is common, even if you follow all the advice. However, **do ask questions, from the first treatment on, and take notes:** what is the PCO using? What does each substance do? Make a note of where each substance is applied, and how long the process takes. If a few treatments go by and you are suspicious, post a question here with these details—experienced Bedbuggers and reputable PCOs read this site and may be able to offer advice as to whether you're getting good service or not. Stay on top of what's happening, but be honest with the PCO about what you're doing, and ask what you can do to support treatment. If they are good, they will welcome your involvement. Vacuuming every day in some cases is a good idea, in others, it may sabotage the work of certain substances left down to kill bed bugs. The same is true of bagging everything you own, as above. Never assume that you should do what someone online is doing, since they may be working with a different pest control protocol.