

BED BUGS

DESCRIPTION: The adult bed bug is 3/16-inch long, oval, flat and rusty-red or mahogany in color. The bed bug is flat and thin when unfed but becomes more elongate, plump and red when it is full of blood. Four-segmented antennae are attached to the head between the prominent compound eyes. The three-segmented beak, or proboscis, is located beneath the head and passes back between the front legs. The bed bug cannot fly as its wings are reduced to short wing pads.

BIOLOGY: As the female bed bug lays her eggs (i.e. one to five per day and 200-500 within her lifetime); she uses a clear substance to attach them in cracks and on rough surfaces. Under ideal conditions, eggs hatch in about seven days and the nymphs molt five times, taking a blood meal between each molt. Development time from egg to adult is 21 days. The adult can live for almost one year.

HABITS: The bed bug hides in cracks and crevices during the day, preferring to rest on wood and paper surfaces instead of stone and plaster. It leaves these harborage areas at night to feed on its host, which includes humans, birds, dogs, and family pets. The blood meal requires three to ten minutes and usually goes unnoticed by the victim. After feeding, the bite site may become inflamed and itch severely in sensitive people. Although the bed bug has been associated with over 25 diseases, transmission has not been conclusively proven. Over time, the harborage areas become filled with the molted skins, feces, and old egg shells of the resident bed bugs. These areas have a characteristic “stink bug” smell caused by a secretion emitted by the bed bug.

CONTROL: A thorough inspection is necessary to detect harborage sites. The odor and specks (i.e. the little spots of excreted blood) that they produce assist in pinpointing these areas. Sanitation is helpful in control of bed bugs because it assists the homeowner to become aware of some of the harborage areas. A vacuum cleaner will remove some of the bed bugs. Bed bugs can be controlled with thorough applications of residual insecticides applied to cracks and crevices, behind baseboards, and into other known or suspected harborage areas. Furniture, especially mattresses and box springs, should also be lightly sprayed. However, bedding of infants and infirm individuals should not be treated, but, rather, replaced. Dusts can effectively be used in wall voids and attics.

