Bed Bugs (*Cimex lectularius*)

Bed bugs are small, parasitic insects that feed on the blood of humans and animals while they sleep. Adult bed bugs are about ¼ inch in length, about the size of an apple seed. They are oval and flat. Bed bugs can be off-white to light tan, deep brown, or burnt orange in color. The host's dark blood may be apparent in the body of the bug. Bed bugs cannot fly.

Bed bugs can be found worldwide and have been reported more frequently in recent years. They most often are found in rooms where people sleep and generally reside on or near beds or other furniture used for sleeping. Bed bugs are typically inactive during the day. Bed bugs are not known to transmit any infectious diseases. A bed bug infestation can include rusty-colored blood spots on the mattress or nearby furniture. Bed bugs and their shed skin can be seen on mattresses and sheets. Occasionally a sweet musty odor can be detected in a room with a heavy bed bug infestation.

Transmission

- **Bed bugs are usually transported from place to place as people travel.**
  - The bed bugs travel in the seams and folds of luggage, overnight bags, folded clothes, bedding, furniture, and anywhere else where they can hide.
  - Most people do not realize they are transporting stow-away bed bugs as they travel from location to location, infecting areas as they travel.

Bed bugs can survive for months without feeding, so they may be present in apparently vacant and clean apartments, hotels, or other types of residences. Bed bugs can spread as long as a host is living with them.

Symptoms

- **Bites** can occur on the face, neck, arms, hands or any body part. Bed bugs generally bite during the night while hosts are asleep. While feeding, the bugs inject their saliva, which contains an anesthetic and an anticoagulant, into the skin, so their bites are painless.
  - Bite marks may take from one to 14 days to develop.
  - Bites often show up in a row of three to seven bites.
  - After a prolonged period of time, the bites may cause the host to have a mild to intense allergic reaction.
- **Sores** caused by a bite look like a mosquito bite.
  Itching the sores may lead to a secondary bacterial infection.

Diagnosis

Many different types of insects resemble bed bugs. Samples of bugs should be collected and submitted to an entomologist for evaluation. Bed bugs should be suspected by health care provider if individuals complain of bites that occurred while they were sleeping.

Treatment

- **Antihistamines and corticosteroids** may be used to treat sores or reduce allergic reactions and inflammation.
- Bed bug sores **usually do not pose a serious medical threat**

Prevention

- **Avoid** bringing bed bugs home
- **Inspect** used furniture prior to bringing into your home
- **Wash** used clothing immediately after bringing into your home
- **Avoid placing luggage or personal items** on the bed at hotels
- **Inspect hotel beds, personal luggage, and personal items** for bed bugs when traveling
- **A pest control professional should be consulted for insecticidal treatments in your home**
- If you are a tenant, contact your property manager for a bed bug inspection

For more information about the treatment of bed bugs visit www.hhs.nd.gov/bedbugs. If you have further questions about the treatment of your bed bug bites, contact your health care provider.

Exclusion Guidance

Individuals with bed bugs should not be excluded from work, school, or child care unless the General Exclusions Apply.

For additional information about bed bugs, contact North Dakota Health and Human Services' Public Health Division at 800.472.2180.

Resources:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, September 22). Bed Bugs. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved May 24th, 2023, https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/bedbugs/index.html.
2. United States Environmental Protection Agency. (2023, May 15). Bed Bugs: Get Them Out and Keep Them Out. United States Environmental Protection Agency. Retrieved May 24th, 2023, https://www.epa.gov/bedbugs.

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