

## How Much Do You Know About Bed Bugs?

If your parent or grandparent ever tucked you in at night, you may have heard this common, yet somewhat curious, chant. Most children never see or hear of bedbugs and never have any idea what their ridiculous parents are talking about, drifting off to sleep without any concern of the attack of the so-called 'bedbugs'. But, what they are blissfully unaware of is that there actually are bedbugs, scientific name *cimex lectularius*, and they would love to dine on the delicate flesh of a tender young offspring, if given the chance.

These creatures were most common when our ancestors were dwelling in caves, unprotected from the creatures preying on all the common wildlife of the day, but almost unheard of in the modern world of developed society. Approximately the size of a small apple seed as adults, these creepy-crawlies are notoriously difficult to find. They, like the common tick, are thin enough to slip between floor boards, under outlet covers and into the smallest spaces one could imagine, only emerging at night to feast on their unsuspecting prey.

The result of their bite and feast is no more or less harmful than that of a spider or dedicated mosquito – swelling and itching usually – and can only carry live disease, such as HIV, for up to an hour on its mouth parts so is not well known for passing disease in the modern world. And adult bedbugs can survive up to one year without feeding on blood, so their survivorship of hard times is quite amazing.

The last decade has seen an unprecedented increase in reported bites in highly developed countries – Australia in particular, reporting a 700% increase from 2000 to 2004 compared to the previous 4-year period. There however, the vast majority of the cases were reported from lower-end lodging such as back-packer hotels, people camping or in less than standard dwelling. But even here, in the good old US of A, there are increased reports on both coasts and everywhere in between, from hospitals and dorm rooms, hotels and motels, apartments and even town homes, single family homes and on cruise ships - anywhere there's good eating for these hungry little bugs. The higher density the population, the happier they are with no regard to income or social status.

Immigrants and travelers have been blamed for their recent re-introduction into modern and developed countries in recent years. With no place on earth outside a couple days travel, we could potentially see other interesting parasites make it onto US turf as well, if customs has no way of detecting and eliminating them.

There is one additional variety of bedbug, *cimex hemipterus*, that prefers tropical settings, that is said to be in up to 65% of homes located in those regions. These have also made their way into Australia, but not yet to the US, most of which were directly linked to travel to Asia and other Pacific countries.

One of the reasons cited, but not confirmed for the recent proliferation of these pesky intruders is their increased resistance to certain pesticides. In the past pest-control chemicals tended to be broad based, aimed at wiping out cockroaches, ants and the like but also wiping out the populations of bedbugs at the same time. Now, as chemicals are refined to target very specific species, the bedbug is not affected by them, even immune to their effects, thusly given the opportunity to breed and flourish.

If you have a concern about bedbugs or even suspect them to be in your own home, the best thing to do is alert a pest-control company. Typically they will make some recommendations to you and even visit to inspect the area and apply some chemicals to eliminate the parasites from the area. Do not be alarmed by them however, because besides the itchy bite mark, these little critters are fairly benevolent to you and your children or pets.

## About the Author

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