

News Column for Use Week of 7/8/19
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River Valley Extension District
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Bed Bugs Don't Discriminate

Everyone has probably heard, "Sleep tight, don't let the bed bugs bite." Unfortunately, this is becoming less of an innocent rhyme and more of an annoying adult matter.

Bed bugs don't discriminate. They are not attracted to dirt and grime. Bed bugs can be in the ritziest mansions to the cheapest motels and everywhere in between, even here in the River Valley District.

Bed bugs are small, brownish, flattened insects that feed solely on the blood of humans and warm-blooded animals, such as dogs, cats, and birds. Bed bugs are efficient hitchhikers and are usually transported into dwellings on luggage, clothing, beds, furniture, and other items.

Bed bugs are active mainly at night and usually bite people while they are sleeping. During the daytime, they prefer to hide close to where people sleep, including mattresses, box springs, bed frames and headboards.

Symptoms after being bitten by bed bugs vary from person to person. Many develop an itchy red welt within a day or so of the bite. Others have little or no reaction. Bed bugs feed on any skin exposed while sleeping (face, neck, shoulders, back, arms, legs, etc.). The welts and itching are often wrongly attributed to other causes, such as mosquitoes.

For these reasons, infestations may go a long time unnoticed, and can become quite large before being detected. Bed bugs can substantially reduce quality of life by causing discomfort, sleeplessness, anxiety, and embarrassment.

Bed bugs can be challenging to eradicate so prevention and early detection is important. With occurrences happening in the River Valley District, it is important to educate yourself on how to prevent a bed bug infestation and what to do if an infestation does occur.

To prevent bringing bed bugs into your house:

- Wash and heat-dry all bedding and clothing that touches the floor regularly.
- Check pre-owned furniture, clothing, etc. for signs before bringing them into your home.
- Reduce clutter in your home to minimize the hiding spots for bed bugs.
- When traveling, inspect any room where you will be staying for signs and keep luggage off the floor and away from the bed. Wash and dry clothes immediately when you return home. Inspect your luggage for signs and store it away from your bedroom, such as a garage or basement.

What to do if you suspect bed bugs:

1. Identify the problem. Inspect sleeping areas for indications of an infestation.
2. Correctly identify any pests found. Contact your local extension office about specimen identification.
3. Don't panic. Don't throw out belongings as most can be treated.
4. Think through treatment options. The most effective way to control bed bugs in your home is through a combination of chemical and non-chemical measures with the assistance of a pest management professional.

Our friends at the University of Minnesota started the “Let’s Beat the Bed Bug!” campaign and they have a lot of great resources available to homeowners, tenants, business owners, and more! Check out all their resources here: <https://www.bedbugs.umn.edu/>. Information can also be found on the Environmental Protection Agency’s website at <https://www.epa.gov/bedbugs>.

If you have questions regarding bed bugs, please contact Monica Thayer, Family Resource Management Extension Agent by calling 785-527-5084 or emailing mthayer@ksu.edu.

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