There may be more to the whole ‘Good night, sleep tight, don’t let the bed bugs bite’ bedtime rhyme than you think. A recent survey has shown an increase in the areas’ bed bug population. So what exactly do these insect look like and how can you prevent their dreaded bite?

Bed bugs are not teeny-tiny, invisible insects. Adult bed bugs are between 3/8 to 1/4 of an inch long and are reddish-brown in color and look similar to a flattened tick. The immatures look exactly like the adults, just a much smaller version. When they first immerge from the pin head sized, white eggs, the young are about the size of a pin head and have more of a light tan appearance until they feed. Proper identification of the pest is key. There are several insects that look like bed bugs except for minor differences. To tell the difference between a bed bug and a bat bug, for example, you would need to compare the length of the hair surrounding the head of the insect to the size of its eyeball, not an easy task for the untrained eye.

The food source and feeding habits of the bed bug are what makes most people squirm. Bed bugs feed on blood. They would prefer human blood, but they can feed on Fluffy, Polly, or Fido as well. During the day, bed bugs hide in tight places near beds or where people sleep at night. At night they come out to feed. The bed bugs locate the food source through increased levels of carbon dioxide and by sensing body heat. They normally feed on areas that aren’t covered by clothing, usually around the head, neck, arms, and shoulders or even the legs and ankles.

Determining a bed bug infestation from bite marks isn’t the most reliable method. At one point in time, it was said that bed bugs would feed several times in a line. Recent research has proven that bed bugs feed in more random patterns. To make it more difficult, not everyone reacts the same way to bed bug bites. Some people have severe reactions to the bites, while others can have no reaction at all. Determining if you have bed bugs based upon bite marks alone is not the best method. Identification of the insect is needed to confirm a bed bug infestation.

Bed bugs use a variety of methods to infest. These insects are excellent hitch hikers. They can crawl into luggage in hotels or come with overnight guests, hang onto clothing or hide in personal items like purses and diaper bags. In apartments or higher density housing situations they can move and infest neighboring rooms or apartments or sit and wait for new tenants to move in. They can also be moved in on used or garage sale items like couches, vacuumums, or mattresses.

Bed bugs make their living in tight quarters. They live in tight places, gaps, or cracks around the bed or where people sleep. With a bed, they are often found around the binding of the mattress or box spring or in tight corners of the headboard. Most bed bugs are found in the bed or within 15 feet of the bed. If you try to sleep on the couch to avoid becoming a meal of a bed bug, you might be spreading the infestation. Bed bugs can crawl as much as 20 feet away in a night looking for their next meal.

Prevention is the best way to keep from picking up these hitch hikers. When traveling, inspect the hotel room for bed bugs as soon as you enter the room. Look behind the headboard, the mattress and box spring and other locations near the bed. Place your luggage on the metal stand or store in the bathroom, which is usually the farthest away from the bed and has flooring that makes it easy to spot bed bugs. Zip up your luggage to keep large adults from crawling inside. Inspect used items when purchasing or renting. If possible, wash in hot water and dry the item on the hottest setting for at least 30 minutes.

With a little prevention there are things that you can do to keep the bed bugs from biting and from becoming a pest. Sleep tight.

**Upcoming Programs:**

Extension Master Gardener Training. Session 1- Tuesday evenings February 7 through March 13, 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. Session 2- 9:00-12:00 noon and from 1:00-4:00 p.m. March 12, 14, 16, 19, 21, and 23. Program is offered for a fee. Please contact Elizabeth Killinger, 308-385-5088, prior to January 30th with the Master Gardener training session you are interested in attending. More information, updated schedules, and a brochure can be found at [http://hall.unl.edu](http://hall.unl.edu). For more information e-mail Elizabeth Killinger at ekilinger2@unl.edu, call 308-385-5088, or visit the Nebraska Extension in Hall County website: hall.unl.edu

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