

Bed bugs are increasingly being reported in homes throughout Iowa and the country. While bed bugs don't jump from person to person like lice, or don't carry disease like mosquitoes, or leave behind allergens like cockroaches, bed bugs are irritating. They mostly feed on the blood of humans, leaving a large welt and itchy bite behind.

Bed bugs are small insects without wings. They are currently found in all 50 states, including Iowa, and are most often found around areas where people sleep or rest. Adult bed bugs look similar to a tick and have flat copper colored bodies that are about one fourth of an inch long. Young bed bugs are nearly colorless and very small.

Bed bugs are most active between midnight and three a.m. and are rarely active during daylight hours, only coming out when they sense the warmth and odors of a body at rest. Their small flat bodies allow them to hide in cracks and crevices of mattresses, bedding, furniture, and draperies and are difficult to spot without careful inspection. However, evidence of their presence can be found with the help of a flashlight by looking for small bloodstains from crushed bed bugs or dark brown spots from bed bug droppings on mattresses. Young bed bugs shed their skin several times, so their "empty shells" may also be seen.

Bed bug infestations can be remedied with proper sanitation, thorough cleaning, and professional extermination. There are no current local health regulations to enforce bed bug eradication but some cities have protective measures for tenants of buildings in their Rental Code. To learn more and for a list of local exterminators with bed bug experience visit www.polkcountyiowa.gov/health.