

# Bedbugs are a problem beyond Paris. They're resurgent everywhere

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Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Thanks to videos circulating on social media of bedbugs crawling through Parisian hotel rooms, movie theaters and public transportation, anxiety over the blood-sucking insects is high.

"No one is safe," from the threat of bedbugs, Paris' deputy mayor said of the phenomenon in early October, and the country's prime minister has promised the government is working to find long-term solutions for detecting infestations ahead of the Paris Olympics in June. But despite the recent uptick in sightings, a Texas A&M entomologist says the outbreak isn't exactly anything new.

The reality is, said Texas A&M University AgriLife Associate Professor and Extension entomologist Robert Puckett, the surge is worldwide—and it's been an issue for years.

## **Why they're on the rise**

There are some obvious driving factors. To start, people are traveling more than ever. As a [population](#) that's always on the move, this means even more opportunities for bedbugs to crawl into our belongings and hitch a ride from location to location.

Another main reason, Puckett said, is that bedbugs have become highly resistant to pyrethroid and neonicotinoid insecticides, two commonly used classes of insecticides. "We're running out of arrows to fire at them," he said.

Their elusive nature also can make the insects difficult to spot. Part of this has to do with their size and shape.

An adult bedbug is about the size and shape of an apple seed and darkly colored—not exactly inconspicuous. But a newly hatched bedbug can be tough to spot with the naked eye. They're lightly colored and tiny—Puckett said that compared to a penny, they're about the size of Abraham Lincoln's tie.

And while the adults are easier to see with the [naked eye](#), they're flat and

thin, making them excellent at hiding. When they're not actively looking for a host to feed on, Puckett said bedbugs can tuck themselves away in "unimaginably small spaces."

"At the first bedbug infestation I visited in my role at the university, the pest management professional who was with me was positive there was an infestation, but we couldn't find them," he said. "There were wooden bunk beds with dovetail joints, and when I took a business card from my wallet and slid it through a tiny gap, the bedbugs fell out."

Puckett said bedbugs feed on humans while they're sleeping. People don't feel the insects crawling on them thanks to a chemical bedbugs release that prevents us from detecting the bite. Most people are tipped off in the morning when they wake up with itchy welts on their skin that look like mosquito bites.

"After you go through that a few times, the lightbulb tends to go off," Puckett said. "Oftentimes, people will also find the insects or blood stains on the mattress."

## **How to avoid bedbugs**

While bedbugs can be tricky to spot, Puckett said they're easy to avoid if you follow a few preventive steps.

They can show up anywhere, from small towns to big cities. People are most likely to run into them at hotels or rental properties, and Puckett said it's important to note bedbugs don't discriminate between [luxury hotels](#) or budget options.

Puckett's advice: When entering a hotel room, immediately put your luggage in the bathtub or on a countertop. Bedbugs are not good climbers, and they can't make their way up the side of a slick surface.

Once your belongings are safely out of bedbugs' reach, it's time to check the bed.

Pull back the fitted sheet and look not only for the insects themselves, but for the telltale sign of blood stains on the mattress. He also recommends checking chairs, dressers and other furniture in close proximity to the bed.

"It takes just a few minutes, and will save folks a ton of heartache, because if you bring these home, you're going to spend a lot of money trying to solve it," Puckett said.

If you do end up bringing bedbugs home, it's not a do-it-yourself project to take on. Puckett said he fields thousands of calls every year related to pests. Bedbugs are on the small list of pests best left to the professionals, he said.

People should be reassured, though, that it's unlikely that they will bring bedbugs into their homes. Even Puckett, who makes collecting trips to locations with known infestations, has yet to do so.

"When I get home from a trip I go in the garage and strip off my clothes, put them in the washer and then dry them on the highest heat possible," he said. "I've never moved them into the house, and I've been in some really heavy infestations."

Provided by Texas A&M University

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