

Bedbugs can hitch a ride on just about anything

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You might want to think twice before combing the alleyways and resale stores for a bargain because one man's trash may turn into a treasure trove of bedbugs.

"A family came in covered in bedbug bites from infested 'free' furniture they found in an abandoned apartment," said Dr. Joseph Leija, an allergist at Gottlieb Memorial Hospital, which is part of the Loyola University Health System. "The couple had only taken the wooden headboards and baseboards of the beds - not the mattresses because they knew that would be unsanitary - as well as a table and chairs. The bugs were found in the tiny crevices," he said. Dr. Leija also has recently cared for patients with bedbug bites traced back to clothing purchased at neighborhood garage sales and resale stores.

"[Bedbugs](#) are insidious survivors that travel well. They hide in cracks in wood and in the weave of cloth," Dr. Leija said of the parasite known scientifically as *Cimex lectularius*. "They are vampires. They are dormant during the day but come out at night and feed on human blood."

Bedbugs have a set of pinchers. They use one to pierce the skin and inject saliva, which contains anticoagulants and a numbing solution, while the other pincher sucks the blood of its host, Dr. Leija said. "The male bedbug also uses the pincher to pierce the abdomen of the female during reproduction, and bedbugs reproduce rapidly," he said.

Bedbugs find their prey by seeking carbon dioxide or warmth given off by mammals.

"The bites can result in a skin rash or even large, weeping blisters due to allergic reaction," said Dr. Leija. "But, for many, the psychological damage is greater than what they suffer physically."

Here are Dr. Leija's top five tips on bedbugs:

• If you buy used clothing, keep it tightly sealed in a plastic bag before washing immediately in hot water. "Use the dryer at high heat to make sure all parasites are killed," Dr. Leija said.

• Paint or seal any newly acquired used furniture. "Bedbugs are so tiny they have been known to hide in screw holes," Dr. Leija said.

• Spray insecticide and vacuum bedding and furniture thoroughly and throw the vacuum cleaner bag outside in the trash. "Keep spraying the insecticide and vacuuming daily; check for tiny brown bugs or pieces that may be part of the bug," Dr. Leija said.

• As you travel this holiday, check the mattress before bedding down. "If you see tiny brown specks, move yourself and your clothing and your luggage out immediately," Dr. Leija said. "And tell the hotel manager or your hosts what you have discovered to prevent further infiltration."

• If you are bitten by a bedbug, "Wash the area carefully with soap and water, drying thoroughly. Apply anti-itch cream, such as calamine lotion, to prevent irritation and limit scratching," Dr. Leija said. If the bite becomes warm to the touch, swells or hurts, go to the doctor for prescription medication.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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