

Bed Bugs Transcript

00:00:01 Announcer

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00:00:25 Mindy McCulley

Hello and welcome to Talking FACS. What you need to know about family, food, finance, and fitness. I am your host, Mindy McCulley, Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Specialist for instructional support at the University of Kentucky.

Today, my guest is Doctor Zachary DeVries, who is an Assistant Professor of Urban Entomology in the Department of Entomology. Welcome, Zach.

00:00:49 Zach DeVries

Hi. Thanks for having me.

00:00:50 Mindy McCulley

And we're gonna talk about bedbugs today. I think that this is probably a topic that as soon as I mentioned it, people are starting to itch or, or squirm a little bit but bedbugs are something that many of us have had to deal with, especially when traveling. And so let's talk about what we can do.

First of all, maybe we should talk about what bedbugs are. So why don't you just kind of tell us what are bedbugs?

00:01:14 Zach DeVries

Yeah. No, that's a great place to start, so and especially because I think a lot of people there still remains a lot of confusion about what is a bedbug. So in its basic sense, you know, bedbugs are small parasites that live on or around.

I would say our beds, but it's our sleeping areas. Not everybody sleeps on bed all the time. So they could be on a couch or a sofa or a nightstand, something next to where we're sleeping, et cetera.

But small parasites that feed on our blood or also on animal blood. So they can feed on companion animals as well. And they're a major problem. they have some pretty significant effects on humans.

Obviously, when they bite us, the bites can be annoying. They're very itchy. If you get a lot of bedbugs in one house, you can get a lot of bites in any given night. So it can cause tremendous distress that way. They're also very difficult to get rid of. We'll talk about management, I think later.

But, you know, economically speaking, it's very expensive to hire a professional, but that's really the only out that we have that's very effective.

So very expensive to get rid of, very traumatizing for people to deal with them. So anybody who's ever had to deal with bedbugs knows that the effects of the bedbugs are gonna last a lot longer than the bedbugs themselves. So, you know, you might get rid of the bedbugs in, in a month or two. But you might be living with this idea of, do I have bedbugs for a much longer period of time?

00:02:32 Mindy McCulley

So I know from traveling when I have been in a hotel room that had bedbugs, the hotel will often come and take all of your stuff and get it cleaned and move you to a different room. But you still worry that you have those bedbugs going home with you.

00:02:47 Zach DeVries

Exactly. I mean, it's the unseen fear that really kind of drives a lot of this because that's, and we'll get, again, we'll get to management later. But, but yeah, just this unknown of, do I have them? What's gonna happen and hopefully we can clear some of that up through our talk today. But yeah, a major, major problem if I, but if I was gonna say one silver lining is luckily they don't transmit any diseases.

00:03:10 Mindy McCulley

So that I was gonna say, What are the harms that they might provide? So, it's good to know they don't.

00:03:14 Zach DeVries

There's one positive to all of this is that at least they're not transmitting diseases like ticks and mosquitoes and all of the others.

00:03:22 Mindy McCulley

They're just uncomfortable to deal with. So, where did the bugs come from? Are they something that just been around and we've just got them in our homes?

00:03:30 Zach DeVries

So their origin is really fascinating. You know, the the theory and nobody really knows this. But, we suspect that they're around with humans when humans lived in caves a long time ago. And they would feed on bats in those caves and, and the bats so would move back, move in and out of the caves and the humans didn't. So they kind of made their way down and fed on humans and then people moved out of caves and they spread with them. That's the theory behind it. At least what we do know for sure is they've been around for a really long time. We know that even back to like ancient Egypt, we've got pictures and drawings and things of their presence there.

So they've been plaguing people for an extremely long time, but surprisingly, they disappeared. I think it was the mid 19 fifties. They just kind of dropped off the face of the earth and there's some theories as to why, but we don't really know.

So, people growing up from 1950 to early two thousands, you don't, you heard, you know, "Sleep tight, Don't let the bedbugs bite." And that was your knowledge of a bedbug. They were a myth or a legend or something else.

But unfortunately, they've made a pretty resounding, you know, resurgence in the last 15 or 20 years to where now they've become almost, you know, common may not be the right word, but they're, for lack of a better term, They're pretty common now we see them all the time.

00:04:46 Mindy McCulley

So, if I think I found a bed bug or, or if I, I guess if I found one bedbug then I found a bunch of bedbugs. Right?

00:04:56 Zach DeVries

Yeah. Yeah. So, the first thing to do, regardless of what situation is, don't panic.

There's a tendency of people when they see a bedbug and I, and I know it's a lot easier said than done to immediately call everybody. You can find, grab whatever sprays you can find, just do anything. And while that may, may make you feel productive, it oftentimes isn't gonna solve the problem, it's just gonna exacerbate things.

So don't panic. You know, the first thing I tell people to do after finding a bedbug is start with a simple inspection on the bed and we've got a fact sheet.

I think you'll share it at the end of the, the podcast. But, you know, there's some pictures and things of places to look. I look around the bed, pull up mattress, seams, look around box springs.

If you're in a chair, recliner, kind of look in folds and gaps and seams and places around there. You know, again, you can reach out to one of your, one of your local extension agents. They can hopefully guide you through some of this, But you're gonna wanna do an inspection. You might also want to set out some traps. you know, and I think that's also contained in the fact sheet that we have. But you're gonna want to, you can set out some traps and ultimately what you want to build towards is you need to find some live bedbugs to get this properly dealt with.

Because if you find evidence of past infestations, if you find dead bugs, it can be very difficult for, for a pest control company or anybody to kind of do anything. And what they, what they really need is evidence.

What you need to, to know you have a bed bug problem live bugs, which can be often pretty hard to find, but that's really what you're looking for.

And like I said, as you start this process, it can be challenging and I would definitely encourage everybody to reach out to your local extension offices with specimens, pictures , IDs as you're going through the process and try and get them, them to help you.

And I would also just add at the end of that, don't rely on the bites alone. These can be an initial indicator. So if you wake up and you have a bunch of mysterious bites, It can be a clue. Like "hey, maybe I should go look for bedbugs," But it is not evidence that bedbugs are there. There are a lot of things in your home or around your home that can cause bites or bite like symptoms that aren't that bugs.

So, don't panic, you know, first and foremost, don't panic. Take a deep breath and then work yourself through the process and make sure you can find bugs. You get them ID'd by an expert and then you can proceed with management as needed.

00:07:13 Mindy McCulley

And is management something that people could do on their own or do they need to call a professional to get that taken care of?

00:07:20 Zach DeVries

Yeah. So, in my opinion, it is something that, that would require a professional. They are very, very tricky. And I don't want to say that there aren't instances where people homeowners have been able to take care of the problem on their own. But I

would say for every one case where somebody does, I've got 100 cases where people fail to do so and they actually can make the problem worse.

07:46 Mindy McCulley

So the odds of you being in that 1% are not good.

00:07:47 Zach DeVries

Right? It's very, very small and, and it almost, you know, you end up paying one way or another because the amount of effort that you have to put in to do it yourself is it's very labor intensive. You're washing things, you're drying things because a lot of our insecticides are, are, you know, are just not great anymore.

So usually the, the way that bedbug management works, the companies that do it well, they'll take an integrated approach usually. And that integrated approach involves a lot of elbow grease. There's a lot of effort. There's a lot of work. It's not, there's no magic bullet or, or secret pesticide that gets rid of them. It's hard work and effort that, that really does the job and knowledge of their behavior and biology.

So, yeah I mean, you really do need to bring in a professional if you're even in, have any questions about it while I still, it was just avoid starting to treat by yourself until you know what you're doing.

Because if you, sometimes the treatment that you put in can actually make the situation a lot worse. You know, bedbugs are very predictable in their natural behavior.

They tend to be found or found around where people are. But if you start treating on your own and use an ineffective product, like let's say bug bombs are a common one, they don't work at all, but people will, will pull them out and use them. What they'll do is they actually can spread the bugs out.

So, if I as a professional walks into your house to treat for bedbugs, if you would have done nothing, maybe all the bedbugs are on your bed and your nightstand. But now you set off a bug bomb or you use some other insecticide and now they're everywhere. They're in your closet, they're in your kitchen, they're in your bathroom and their job just got 10 times harder and, and it's gonna take a lot longer,

00:09:16 Mindy McCulley

A lot more effort. So, more money, probably. Right?

00:09:19 Zach DeVries

Exactly. Exactly.

So, avoid doing anything yourself, you know, until you kind of know what you're doing essentially. And generally speaking, I would avoid doing things yourself and bring in a professional, I think it's just, it just ends up being a better solution.

00:09:32 Mindy McCulley
Right.

00:09:33 Zach DeVries
You know, but that's difficult to say, sometimes not everybody has the money because it can be very expensive to do this. And so, but when you can, using a professional is, is advised.

00:09:44 Mindy McCulley
I think that that sounds like great advice. and I hope that none of our listeners have to deal with bedbugs. But if they do, I appreciate that you've given them some good information about how to handle it and not to panic.

I guess it's, the biggest thing. So, who cares if the bedbugs bite?

00:10:01 Zach Devries
Right.

00:10:02 Mindy McCulley
It'll be, you'll be ok in the morning, right?

00:10:04 Zach Devries
You'll be able to take care of it and it, they are a solvable problem and they're something we can definitely, we, we have the tools, the knowledge and the expertise available, particularly in, in Kentucky. We've got some really good pest control companies. We can get rid of bed bugs.
So don't don't panic.

You always take a deep breath and,
and again, your extension agents and others out there are there to help you.
So, so use those resources at your disposal.

00:10:30 Mindy McCulley
I think that's great advice.

Thanks, Zach, for joining me today and talking about something that's making me a little itchy.

00:10:37 Zach DeVries

Thanks, and sorry, sorry for the itches.

00:10:39 Mindy McCulley

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00:10:47 Announcer

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