

Bed bugs



With global travel increasing, growing insecticide resistance and new limits on pesticides, bed bugs have spread to nearly every city in the world. Even the cleanest houses, hotels and apartments are susceptible. Only regular inspection and cleaning can help prevent infestation.

What are bed bugs?

Bed bugs are small, reddish-brown wingless insects. They range from 1mm to 7mm in size (about the size of an apple seed) and have oval bodies. Bed bugs usually bite people and animals at night while they sleep, feeding on their blood. They can bite anywhere on the body, but especially concentrate on exposed skin around the face, neck, upper torso, arms and hands.

Who is at risk?

Workers who handle bedding, clothing or furniture are at higher risk for exposure to bed bugs. These include home care workers, paramedics, police, public health inspectors, people who travel frequently for work and people who work in hospitals, nursing homes, shelters, municipal buildings and schools.

How can infestation occur?

Bed bugs are experts at hiding. They move very quickly and can travel through hallways, plumbing and electrical lines in a building. Bed bugs can travel up to 20 feet in search of a human host. They can also climb into bags or onto clothing, which allows them to be carried from one place to another without being noticed. Because they reproduce quickly, an infestation can grow from a few bugs to thousands in a short time.

What are the effects of bed bugs?

Some people do not react to bed bug bites. Others may have small skin reactions. In rare cases, people can have severe allergic reactions. Current evidence suggests that bed bugs do not transmit diseases. However, there are rare reports of bed bugs transmitting drug-resistant bacteria like methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) and vancomycin-resistant *Enterococcus faecium* (VRE).

Bed bugs also have social impacts. Stress, sleep problems, anxiety, depression and isolation can all occur because of the assumption that people with infested homes are not clean. This stigma may lead people to delay getting help when they discover an infestation, which can increase the likelihood of transmitting bed bugs to others. On top of this, the cost of treating a bed bug infestation can be significant depending on how widespread it is.

Signs of bed bugs

- bites (especially if they are in a line)
- sightings of live or dead bugs
- black dots the size of a period or dirt-like spots (bed bug excrement)
- red or rusty stains on sheets (blood smears)
- shed skins
- pale eggs the size of a pinhead

How to check for bed bugs

When not feeding, bed bugs hide in a variety of places. If you are concerned, you should check for live bed bugs or their shells in the following areas:

- any upholstered furniture
- cluttered storage areas
- paper stacks and books
- seating in transportation including on buses, planes, trains or taxis
- wheelchairs and stretchers
- in power outlets and appliances
- in bedrooms, including:
 - behind headboards and around cracks and crevices of the bed and baseboards
 - in the seams and tufts of mattresses
 - inside the box spring and along the bed frame
 - in and around nightstands or other bedside furniture such as window and door casings, pictures, moldings, loose wallpaper, curtain folds and partitions and clutter

How to deal with bed bug infestations in the workplace

If you suspect bed bugs are present in the workplace, report it to your supervisor. If the issue is not addressed quickly, report the concern to your health and safety committee or health and safety representative.

The following precautions can help prevent bed bug infestations in the workplace.

Employers should:

- provide training to identify signs of bed bugs, where to look for them, how infestations spread and how employees should respond to a possible infestation
- develop a written bed bug action plan and make sure all staff members are trained on it
- keep records of infestations to track trends such as intensity, location and time of year

If your workplace is infested:

- use appropriate personal protective equipment, such as coveralls, disposable shoe covers and gloves
- keep personal belongings in sealable plastic containers
- ensure procedures are in place and equipment is on hand to clean potentially infested clothing and other items

How to avoid bed bugs while travelling for work

People who travel for work are at higher risk of exposure to bed bugs. The following tips can help:

- Check your hotel's history of bed bug problems on travel websites—but remember, any hotel can be infected regardless of name or quality.
- Keep your luggage on a rack rather than on upholstered furniture, the floor or the bed.
- Hang personal items like purses, bags and coats from a hook or a doorknob to keep them off the floor.
- Check the bed for bugs, blood stains and droppings. Remove the sheets and check the mattress, running your fingers along the upper and lower seams. Make sure to check the mattress tag, as bed bugs often hide there.
- Check the bedside table, drawers and along the wall on the side of bed that is less likely to be disturbed by cleaning staff or guests.

- During your stay, keep your shoes in an open area and do not store anything under the bed.
- If you find signs of bed bugs, request another room. Inform hotel management so they can close and treat the room. If your belongings may have been exposed, ask the hotel to dry your clothing on high heat for 30 minutes. Inspect any new room you are offered.
- Inspect your luggage carefully when you pack to leave.
- After your trip, unpack luggage outdoors on a hard surface. Re-inspect clothing and then wash and dry on high heat. Put delicates in the freezer for two weeks.
- Vacuum luggage thoroughly and throw out the vacuum bag in a sealed garbage bag right away.

What to do if you find bed bugs at home

If you find bed bugs in your home, contact your local public health unit, landlord, building manager, healthcare provider or pest control for help.

Bargaining protections

If your occupation puts you at a higher risk of exposure, bargain collective agreement language on bed bug prevention, treatment and remediation cost recovery.

Sample language:

In the event that an employee contracts lice, scabies, pink eye, bed bugs, ringworm or other such communicable condition while performing their regular duties and such communicable condition requires treatment, eradication or medications for them or their immediate family, the employer shall reimburse the employee for all reasonable costs of such treatment upon production of receipts for expenses not covered under the collective agreement's benefit plan.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

CUPE National Health and Safety Branch 1375 St. Laurent Boulevard, OTTAWA, ON K1G 0Z7
Tel: (844) 237-1590 (toll free) Email: health_safety@cupe.ca