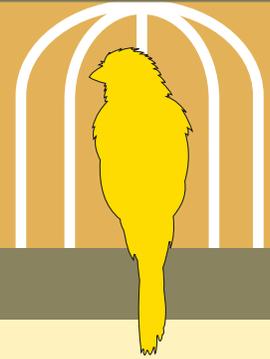


Bed Bugs

HEALTH AND SAFETY FACT SHEET

CUPE / Canadian Union
of Public Employees



With global travel expanding, new limits on pesticides and insecticide resistance, bed bugs have spread to just about every city in the world. Even the cleanest houses, hotels or apartments are susceptible to bed bugs, though regular inspection and cleaning can help prevent an infestation.

What are bed bugs?



Actual size

Bed bugs are small, wingless insects—about the size of an apple seed—with oval-shaped bodies.

They feed on human blood, typically at night when people are asleep. They will bite all over, especially where there is exposed skin around the face, neck, upper torso, arms and hands. Workers that need to enter the homes, like home care workers, paramedics or public health inspectors are at especially high risk of exposure, along with those who travel frequently for work, and those who work in hospitals, nursing homes, shelters, municipal buildings and schools.

What are the effects of bed bugs?

Some people do not react at all to the bites, while others may have small skin reactions. In rare cases, some people can have severe allergic reactions. Current scientific evidence suggests that bed bugs do not transmit diseases. However there have been reports that show that while rare, bedbugs are capable of transmitting drug-resistant bacteria including methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) and vancomycin-resistant *Enterococcus faecium* (VRE).

There can also be negative social consequences associated with bed bugs. Stigmatization, physiological distress, sleep disturbances, anxiety,

depression and isolation can all occur due to a perception that people whose dwellings have been infested are unclean. This stigma may lead people to delay getting help when they discover an infestation in their own home, which can increase the likelihood of transmitting bed bugs to others. The treatment of bed bug infestation can become costly depending on the extent of the infestation.

How to check for bed bugs

Bed bugs prefer to be hidden. If you are concerned, you should check for live bed bugs or their shells, left over from the molting process, in the following areas:

- 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, mouldings, loose wallpaper, curtain folds and partitions and clutter.
- Wheelchairs and stretchers.

How to deal with bed bug infestations in the workplace

- Staff should be **trained** to identify signs of bed bugs, including bites, as well as 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 ensure all staff members are trained.
- Keep **records of infestations** to track trends in intensity, location, time of year, etc.

- If an area is suspected of being infested, use **personal protective equipment** such as coveralls, disposable shoe covers and gloves where appropriate and leave personal belongings in sealable plastic containers.
- If you think you may have been exposed to bed bugs in the workplace, **inspect your clothing** and equipment before leaving and change into fresh, unexposed clothing.
- Ensure **procedures are in place** and equipment is on hand to clean potentially infested clothing and other items.
- If your occupation puts you at a higher risk of exposure, you should **incorporate bargaining language** related to the prevention and treatment of infestations into your collective agreements that includes remediation cost recovery.

Sample language: In the event that an Employee contracts lice, scabies, pink eye, bed bugs or ringworm while performing his/her regular duties and such communicable condition requires treatment, eradication or medications for him/herself or his/her 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.

How to avoid bed bugs while travelling

People who travel for work are at a heightened risk of exposure to bed bugs. The following information can help reduce the risk of exposure:

- **Check the hotel's history** of bed bug problems on travel websites.
- 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 door knob to keep them off the floor.
- **Check the bed** for bugs, blood stains and droppings. Remove bed 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.** Look for signs of bed bugs in the drawers and along the wall on the side of the bed that is less likely to be disturbed by cleaning staff and guests.
- If signs of bed bugs are detected, **request another room.** Be sure to inform hotel management so they can close and treat the room. If you suspect that bed bugs have invaded your belongings, ask the hotel to process your clothing by putting them in a high heat dryer for 30 minutes. You should repeat the inspection of any new room you are offered.
- **Inspect your luggage** carefully when you pack to leave.
- After your trip, **unpack luggage outdoors**, re-inspect clothing and then wash and dry your clothing on hot settings (or put delicates in the freezer for two weeks). Vacuum luggage thoroughly.

What can you do if you find bed bugs in your home?

If you find bed bugs in your home, your local Public Health Unit, landlord, building manager, healthcare provider or a pest control professional can help address the situation.

Sources:
 hc-sc.gc.ca
 ccohs.ca

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FIND MORE RESOURCES: cupe.ca/health-and-safety

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