



Bed Bugs

What is a bed bug?

Bed bugs are small, reddish-brown insects with flat, oval bodies. They are usually 5 to 7 millimetres long (3/8 of an inch). They cannot fly, but can travel quickly. Bed bug nymphs (babies) are about 1 to 4 millimetres long and yellow-white in colour.

Bed bugs feed on the blood of humans and animals. Unlike some parasites, such as fleas or lice, bed bugs do not live on their hosts, but only visit them to feed. They are most active at night and usually feed weekly. Most live for 4 to 6 months, but some may live up to a year with no food. Female bed bugs can lay about 500 eggs in their lifetime.

A bed bug bite usually causes a red bump or flat welt that may be itchy. Bed bugs tend to bite exposed parts of the body (not covered by clothes) such as the face, neck, arms and hands. Several bites may occur close together on the body because bed bugs usually feed more than once. The bites take 1 to 2 weeks to go away.

Bed bugs prefer to hide close to their hosts, which is why their first choice is beds. They can be found in homes, hotels, student residences and shelters. Bed bugs can hitch a ride on such things as clothing, backpacks, luggage and even books.

Are bed bugs a health concern?

There is no evidence that bed bugs spread disease to people. However, public health officials remain concerned about bed bugs because scratching a bite can sometimes cause a skin infection, which can become serious. Applying an antiseptic lotion or antibiotic cream to the area can help prevent infection.

Bed bug infestations can cause significant stress, worry, and insomnia (not being able to sleep). In addition, getting rid of bed bugs can be expensive and time consuming.

What are the symptoms of a skin infection?

Symptoms of an infection include:

- pain, swelling, redness, or warmth around the area;
- red streaks extending from the area;
- pus draining from the area;

- swollen lymph nodes in the neck, armpit or groin; and/or
- fever or chills with no other known cause.

If you have symptoms, contact your health care provider or call **8-1-1** to speak to a registered nurse.

What are the symptoms of an allergic reaction?

Some people may have an allergic reaction to a bed bug bite, usually a small skin reaction in the bite area. In rare cases, some may have severe reactions. Allergic sensitivity may increase the more a person is bitten. If you are concerned about your symptoms, see your health care provider.

How do I know I have bed bugs?

Bite marks on your body, especially around your face, neck, arms and hands, are a sign of bed bugs. To know for sure that you have bed bugs look for the following signs:

- Dark spotting and staining on your sheets, pillow, mattress, bed frame, carpets, clothing and other items that come in close contact with your body. The staining is from their feces and blood from crushed insects.
- Molted (old) skins and eggshells where bed bugs hide.
- In severe cases, you may notice an offensive, sweet, musty odour from their scent glands.

You should inspect the following areas for bed bugs:

- All furniture, especially bedroom furniture, including mattresses and box springs. If you sleep on your couch, make sure you check it.
- In, under, and behind furniture such as chairs, couches and dressers. You may have to take the furniture apart for a closer look, and remove the covers on chairs and couches.
- Under lamps and other items on nightstands.
- Cracks and crevices along baseboards and walls.
- Torn or loose wallpaper, decorative borders, and behind paintings and pictures.

Try to collect a bed bug for identification. Contact a pest control professional or your local health authority if you need help.

How do I prevent bed bugs?

To stop bed bugs from entering your home:

- Do not bring infested items into your home. Thoroughly inspect your clothing, backpacks and luggage. When travelling, check the place you are staying in for signs of bed bugs. Store your luggage off the floor and away from the bed, such as on a luggage stand.
- Clean your home regularly. This includes vacuuming your mattress and cleaning up clutter to reduce the number of places bed bugs can hide.
- If you buy furniture and bedding from second-hand stores or garage sales, check them for bed bugs. Do not rely on the word of the store owner or seller, who may not be up to date on bed bugs.
- Avoid picking up furniture left on the roadside.
- Install or repair screens to stop birds, bats or rodents from entering your home and becoming hosts for bed bugs.

How can I get rid of bed bugs?

There are nonchemical and chemical options for treating bed bug infestations. Often, both types of treatments will be required. Getting help from a qualified pest management professional is recommended. Pest control companies often use chemical insecticides or very high heat. More than one application will likely be necessary.

Building owners should check municipal bylaws before trying to treat infestations on their own.

Nonchemical ways to treat bed bugs

- Vacuum all places that might harbour bed bugs, including the mattress, box spring and bed. Empty the vacuum cleaner into a sealed plastic bag. Throw it out immediately in a tightly closed garbage can.
- Use a scrub brush to remove bed bugs and eggs from the mattress seams. Wash nozzles and brushes in hot water with detergent.

- Wash bedding, clothing and backpacks in hot water and laundry detergent and/or dry your clean clothes, stuffed animals and small nonwashable items in a clothes dryer for at least 30 minutes at a hot temperature setting.
- Items that cannot be washed with hot water or put in the dryer can be steam cleaned. Steam will only kill the bed bugs it touches, so move the steam cleaner slowly to get the steam as deep as possible.
- Dry steam or low-vapour steamers are best because they leave behind less moisture, which reduces the risk of mould.
- Once you feel you have gotten rid of the bed bugs, put mattresses and pillows in encasing covers made to prevent any remaining bed bugs from escaping. If there is a small opening at the zipper end, seal it with strong tape (e.g., duct tape). Keep in mind that bed bugs can live up to a year in your bed, so avoid removing these covers.
- You may also wish to coat bed legs with petroleum jelly to prevent bed bugs from climbing up onto the bed.

Chemical ways to treat bed bugs

- You can buy spray, liquid and dust products at retail stores. Make sure they are registered specifically for bed bugs and follow the directions carefully.
- Health Canada regulates pesticides in Canada. Ensure the label has a Pest Control Products (PCP) registration number.
- Qualified pesticide professionals should be consulted for applying chemical treatments.

For More Information

For more information on how to get rid of bed bugs or to find a licensed pest control company in your areas, visit:

- Government of Canada: Bedbugs – What are they? www.healthycanadians.gc.ca/product-safety-securite-produits/pest-control-products-produits-antiparasitaires/pesticides/tips-conseils/bedbugs-punaises-lits-eng.php
- Canadian Pest Management Association <http://pestworldcanada.net>

For more HealthLinkBC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthlinkbcfiles or your local public health unit. For non-emergency health information and advice in B.C. visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call 8-1-1 (toll-free). For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1. Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.