

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 are 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 for up to a year. Female bed bugs can lay about 200 eggs in their lifetime.

Bed bugs prefer locations where they can hide easily and feed regularly like sleeping areas. They can be found in homes, hotels, student residences and shelters. Bed bugs can hitch a ride on things like clothing, backpacks, luggage and books.

Are bed bugs a health concern?

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. The bites can take 1 to 2 weeks to go away.

Bed bugs are not known to spread disease to people. However, some people may have an allergic reaction to a bed bug bite, usually a small skin reaction in the bite's area. In rare cases, someone may have a severe reaction. To avoid infection, try not to scratch the bites and keep the bite sites clean. Using antiseptic creams or lotions, as well as antihistamines, may help.

Also, some people living in infested homes have reported mental health impacts including anxiety and insomnia.

If you are concerned about your physical or mental health symptoms, see your health care provider or call **8-1-1** to speak to a registered nurse.

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

How do I prevent bed bugs?

Reduce places where bed bugs can hide by:

- Vacuuming often, including under and behind beds
- Repairing or removing peeling wallpaper and tightening loose electrical faceplates
- Sealing all cracks and crevices on wooden bed frames, between baseboards, and in walls, ceilings, windows, door frames and furniture
- Checking any entry points on walls that you share with neighbours and openings that allow access to the inside of the wall (like areas where pipes, wires and other utility services enter)
- Installing or repairing screens to stop birds, bats or rodents from entering your home and becoming hosts for bed bugs

Be careful what you bring into your house:

- Check furniture and bedding you buy from second-hand stores, garage sales, or pick up from the roadside, 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
- New mattresses are often delivered in the same truck that carries away old mattresses, so be careful to check your new mattress before it enters your home. Insist that your new mattress be sealed before it is delivered

Inspect the following areas in your home 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 can I get rid of bed bugs?

There are physical control 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.

Physical control methods to treat bed bugs

Vacuuming

Handheld vacuums, vacuums with a cloth bag, and vacuums with hoses that are made of fabric are not a good idea for bed bug clean-up because these vacuums can become infested:

- Vacuum all places that might harbour bed bugs, including the mattress, box spring and bed. (Use a scrub brush to remove bed bugs and eggs from the mattress seams)
- Dispose of the vacuum bag in a sealed plastic bag. Put the plastic bag in a garbage can with a tight lid. Wash vacuum attachments in hot water with detergent
- Store the vacuum in a large plastic bag and seal it
- For a bagless vacuum cleaner, follow the instructions above, but also empty the canister contents into a plastic garbage bag, and seal and dispose of the bag right away. Wash the dust container in hot water with detergent

Steaming, washing and throwing out items:

- 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

- Store clean, dry items in light-coloured sealed heavy duty plastic bags or plastic storage bins with secure lids to avoid infesting other areas
- Items that cannot be washed with hot water or put in the dryer can be steam cleaned. Bedbugs die at 50°C and steam cleaners generally emit steam at a temperature of at least 100°C. 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
- Putting small items in the freezer or outside is sometimes effective. However, freezing temperatures must be kept for a longer period (4 days of consistent cold at -19°C), and may not kill all bed bugs
- 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). It is a good practice to keep the mattress enclosed this way for a full year
- 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) number
- Do not use pesticides on baby cribs, playpens or toys
- 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.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/pest-control-tips/bedbugs-what-are-they.html
- Canadian Pest Management Association www.pestworldcanada.net

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