



# Bed bugs

The presence of bed bugs in hotels, motels, dormitories, apartments, and houses in the United States has increased in the past few years; **however, bed bugs infest only a very small percentage of residences.** The bite of a bed bug has not been shown to spread disease. Bed bugs may be difficult to control without help from a pest control professional.

## School health and childcare provider information

### Cause

*Cimex lectularius*, a parasitic insect.

Bed bugs are small (up to 1/4" long) flattened, wingless insects that feed on the blood of people and certain animals. After feeding, the color of a bed bug changes from brown to purplish-red. Bed bugs live close to areas where people sleep, rest, or sit for long periods. Bed bugs move quickly, feed at night, and hide in small spaces (under bed mattresses, in furniture, etc.) during the day.

### Symptoms

Painless bites typically on the head, neck, arms, hands, or legs. Bites may become irritated and inflamed. Scratching may cause the bites to become infected. Bed bugs feed at night, so people may not be aware that they were bitten, or the bites can be mistaken for bites from another pest (fleas or mosquitoes).

### Spread

Bed bugs are not spread on people and are not a sign that people are dirty or have unclean homes.

Bed bugs do not jump or fly. They crawl to find a human host, feed for less than 5 minutes, and then hide. Bed bugs like to hide in small places; therefore, it is possible that bed bugs will crawl into luggage, beds, or furniture that is being moved from one place to the next. It is also possible for bed bugs to crawl through small spaces between units in a hotel or apartment building. Because bed bugs can survive for many months without feeding, they may already be present and hidden in apartments or homes that appear to not have any bed bugs.

**Remember: Bed bugs are not transmitted from person to person. They are not like lice and will not usually travel directly on a person's body. Bed bugs are spread between residences when they hide and are transported in luggage, furniture, or other items.**

### Signs of bed bugs

A person notices bites after sleeping that were not there when they went to bed. Note that it can sometimes take up to 14 days after a bite for marks to develop. Because several different kinds of insects

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look like bed bugs, carefully compare bugs with good reference images to confirm their identity. If still unsure about the identity of bugs in the home, contact a pest control expert. Look for blood stains from crushed bugs or dark red spots (bed bug fecal material) on bed sheets and mattresses. Exoskeletons, which are empty shells of bed bugs as they grow from one stage to the next, may be present as well as a sweet musty odor. Also look for live, crawling bed bugs - usually found around the seams and in the folds of bed mattresses or in crevices of the bed frame. In heavier infestations, live bed bugs may be found further away from the bed (window and door frames, electrical boxes, cracks in floors and ceilings, within furniture, behind picture frames on the wall).

## Exclusion

### *Childcare and School*

None. Children and students living in households containing bed bugs do not need to be excluded.

## Treatment

In general, best practice for treating bed bug bites is to avoid scratching the area, however a health care provider may recommend an antihistamine or corticosteroid to reduce allergic reaction and inflammation. Bed bugs are not known to spread any diseases.

## Prevention

- Do not bring infested items into the home. Carefully inspect clothing and baggage after traveling. Pay attention to cracks, crevices, seams, and folds of suitcases and luggage.
- Use caution when buying used furniture. Inspect all furniture and avoid buying used bed mattresses and bed frames. Taking free furniture items left by the curb for disposal or behind places of business is not recommended.

## Control

- After confirming a bed bug infestation in the home, **consult a licensed pest control operator who has experience with bed bugs before beginning any control activities**. Tenants should contact their property manager or landlord to discuss their respective obligations and to agree on a plan to manage the infestation. Generally, landlords are legally required to contract with a licensed pest control operator.
- Control plans will be made on a case-by-case basis; the control plan may include the following activities:
  - Reduce clutter to limit the hiding places for bed bugs.
  - Thoroughly clean infested rooms - vacuum carpets, upholstered furniture, bed mattresses, bed frames, etc. It may be necessary to move and disassemble furniture during cleaning.
  - Wash all bedding and affected clothing in hot water and dry in a hot dryer for at least 20 minutes before using again.
  - Caulk or seal all holes in ceilings, walls, and around baseboards.

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- Various insecticide (chemicals that kill insects) treatments may be needed. The insecticides available are commercial products requiring special equipment and training and are not readily available in “over the counter” products. **Insecticides should only be applied by a licensed pest control operator.**
- Do not apply any insecticides to bed mattresses or on bedding or linens. Work with a certified pest control operator to determine how insecticides will be used and applied in a residence. Insecticide treatments may require people to leave their home for a few hours or even several days. Several treatments may be needed to fully control the problem.

For more information, call Hennepin County HSPHD-Epidemiology at (612) 543-5230 or call your local health department.

For more information about bedbugs, refer to the University of Minnesota’s Extension Office website [www.extension.umn.edu/](http://www.extension.umn.edu/) (in the search box type: bed bugs) or call 612-624-2200 or 1-855-644-2200.

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*Updated December 2023*

