

Bed bugs in the workplace

What are bed bugs?

Bed bugs (*Cimex lectularius*) are oval-shaped, wingless insects about 6 mm (¼ in.) long — the size of an apple seed. They feed solely on blood, which gives them a dark red colour. Bites can cause skin irritation and, in rare cases, allergic reactions.

Bed bugs can live for about one year, during which a female can lay between 200 and 400 eggs. The eggs are white and about the size of a pinhead. Despite increases in bed bug populations in recent years, there are many ways to control bed bugs.



Where are bed bugs found?

Bed bugs can be found wherever people live, and especially in areas where they sleep. Bed bugs like to hide in dark places such as mattress seams, bed frames, upholstered furniture, and small building openings (for example, electrical outlets). The presence of bed bugs does not relate to a lack of cleanliness, so an infestation can happen anywhere.

Bed bugs are most active at night and can move quickly. Although bed bugs cannot fly or jump, they can climb onto items such as bags and clothing. This allows them to travel over long distances. Bed bugs are rarely transferred directly from person to person. However, they can be transferred easily when someone comes in contact with infested items such as bedding.

Bed bugs can be found in places such as the following:

- Homes and apartment buildings
- Hotels and motels
- Libraries
- Health care and social services facilities

You are more likely to be exposed to bed bugs if you work in one of the following industries:

- Health care
- Social services
- Building or property management
- Maintenance or cleaning
- Emergency services



Bed bug eggs and waste are shown above. The eggs take about 10 days to hatch.

Are bed bug bites dangerous?

There is no evidence that bed bugs can carry or transmit bloodborne diseases. Bites are normally painless. However, you may develop red, itchy spots on some parts of your body, such as around your face, neck, upper body, arms, and hands. Some people react within minutes, while others may have bite marks that appear after a few days.

What should I do if bed bugs bite me?

- Wash the bites with soap.
- Reduce swelling by applying ice.
- Avoid scratching.

Symptoms usually go away after a few days. But if the bites become infected, see your doctor.



Bed bug bites

How can I protect myself from bed bugs?

- Wear light-coloured clothing so that you can easily spot bed bugs. Avoid pants with cuffs.
- For heavy infestations, wear disposable coveralls, gloves, and shoe covers. Tape down your gloves and pant legs.
- Limit the number of items you bring into an area that may be infested.
- Hang bags and coats to keep them off the floor, or keep your belongings in a plastic bag or container.

- Change out of work clothes after visiting an area that may be infested. Place these clothes into sealed plastic bags. Wash the clothes in hot water, and dry them on the hottest dryer setting. Put non-washable and dry-clean-only items in a hot dryer for 30 minutes or more.

How can bed bugs be controlled?

- Look for bed bugs in mattresses and furniture (for example, plush chairs). Look for small, dark-brown (fecal) droppings or dark-red (blood) stains.
- Reduce the amount of clutter in the workplace so bed bugs have fewer places to hide.
- Vacuum frequently (especially mattresses). Launder bed linens and clothing on a regular schedule.
- Encase mattresses and box springs with “bed bug-proof” covers to prevent infestation.
- Seal cracks and crevices, including baseboards and electrical outlets.
- Encourage the building or site owner to put in place a pest management plan to control bed bugs.
- Do not apply pesticides on your own. Contact a qualified pest management company.
- Seek advice from local public health officials if needed.

More information and resources

B.C. Ministry of Health: Bed bugs
www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/bed-bugs

Vancouver Coastal Health:
A guide to help you control bed bugs
www.vch.ca/Documents/Guide-to-bed-bug-control.pdf

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety: Bed bugs — have bite, will travel
www.ccohs.ca/newsletters/hsreport/issues/2011/11/ezine.html

Bedbugsinfo.ca: Bed bug fact sheet
www.bedbugsinfo.ca/bed-bugs-in-canada/