

Bed bugs

What is a bed bug?

Bed bugs are small, quick-moving, wingless insects with flat, oval bodies. They range in size from one to 10 mm and in colour from yellow-white to reddish-brown. Bed bugs feed on the blood of humans and animals. Unlike parasites, such as fleas or lice, bed bugs do not live on their hosts, they only visit them to feed. They are most active at night.

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

Are bed bugs a health concern?

A bed bug bite typically causes a red bump or flat welt that may be itchy. Bed bugs usually bite exposed parts of the body (not covered by clothes), such as the face, neck, arms and hands. The bites can take one to two weeks to heal.

Bed bugs are not known to spread disease to humans. Some people do not react at all to the bites, however others may have a small skin reaction. In rare cases, people can have severe allergic reactions.

Avoid scratching the bites to prevent infection and keep the affected area clean. Using antiseptic creams or lotions, as well as antihistamines, can help with symptoms.

Some individuals living in infested homes have reported mental health impacts, such as anxiety and insomnia. If you are concerned about your physical or mental health symptoms, please consult your health care provider or call **8-1-1** to speak with a registered nurse.

How do I know I have bed bugs?

Look for the following signs:

- Bite marks on your body, particularly around your face, neck, arms and hands
- 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 the blood from crushed insects

- Live or dead bed bugs and their molted (old) skin

How do I prevent bed bugs?

Reduce places where bed bugs can hide:

- Vacuum the following areas often:
 - Under and behind all furniture, especially bedroom furniture, including mattresses and box springs
 - Under lamps and other items on nightstands
- You can also coat bed legs with petroleum jelly to prevent bed bugs from climbing up onto the bed
- Repair or remove torn or loose wallpaper and decorative borders
- Tighten loose electrical faceplates
- Seal all cracks and crevices on wooden bed frames, between baseboards, and in walls, ceilings, windows, door frames and furniture
- Check entry points on walls shared with neighbours and openings that allow access inside the wall (such as areas where pipes, wires and other utility services enter)
- Eliminate clutter

Be careful what you bring into your house:

- Check furniture and bedding you buy from second-hand stores, garage sales or roadside pickup. Do not rely on the word of the store owner or seller
- Insist that your new mattress be sealed before it is delivered and check your new mattress before it enters your home

How can I get rid of bed bugs?

There are physical control and chemical options for treating bed bug infestations. Effective control requires a combination of both treatments. It's

advisable to seek assistance from a qualified pest management professional. Pest control companies often employ chemical insecticides or extremely high heat, and multiple applications will likely be necessary.

Inspect your home for bed bugs. Check all areas where bed bugs can hide (see How do I prevent bed bugs?). If you sleep on your couch, make sure you check it thoroughly. You may have to take the furniture apart for a closer look and remove the covers on chairs and couches.

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

Building owners should check municipal bylaws before attempting self-treatment to ensure that treatment is completed safely and legally.

Physical control methods to treat bed bugs

Steaming, washing and throwing out items:

- Wash bedding, clothing and backpacks in hot water and laundry detergent, and dry them on the hottest dryer setting
- Place small non-washable and dry clean-only items in a hot dryer for 30 minutes or more
- Items that cannot be washed with hot water or put in the dryer can be steam cleaned. Dry steam or low-vapour steamers are best because they leave behind less moisture, which reduces the risk of mold. Steam will only kill the bed bugs it touches, so move the steam cleaner slowly to get the steam as deep as possible
- Store clean, dry items in light-coloured, sealed, heavy-duty plastic bags or plastic storage bins with secure lids
- Throw out any items that can't be washed, heated or steam cleaned, and vacuum daily afterwards

Vacuuming:

Handheld vacuums and vacuums with cloth bags or hoses made of fabric are unsuitable for bed bug clean-up because they can become infected. A vacuum with a HEPA filter is recommended for households with family members who have allergies or asthma.

- Vacuum all places that might harbour bed bugs. Use a scrub brush to remove bed bugs and eggs from mattress seams
- Dispose of the vacuum bag in a sealed plastic bag. Put the plastic bag in a garbage can with a tight lid
- Stuff a paper towel into the end of the vacuum hose and seal it with tape to prevent any bed bugs from escaping
- 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 into a plastic garbage bag and seal and dispose of the bag immediately. Wash the dust container in hot water with detergent

Chemical ways to treat bed bugs

- You can buy spray, liquid and dust products at retail stores. Health Canada regulates pesticides to ensure that they meet Canada's standards for health and safety. Before purchasing a product, check that the label has a Pest Control Products (PCP) number and that it is registered specifically for bed bugs, and follow the directions carefully
- Never use any treatment on people, pets or bedding unless the label specifically says to do so
- Do not use pesticides on baby cribs, playpens or toys
- Qualified pesticide professionals are recommended 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 area, 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

For more HealthLinkBC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/more/resources/healthlink-bc-files 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 the deaf and hard of hearing, call **7-1-1**. Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.