



What are bed bugs?

- Adult bed bugs are small, wingless insects, about the size of an apple seed. They feed on the blood of people and animals while they sleep since they are attracted to the exhaled carbon dioxide.
- There are three stages in the lifecycle of a bed bug: egg, nymph (juvenile) and adult.
- They have an oval, flat, brown body that becomes rounded and turns dark reddish-brown after feeding; they feed for 3 to 15 minutes then hide for 5-10 days.
- Bed bugs live for about one year; they can hide and go without feeding for at least 6 months.
- Even though they cannot fly or jump, they travel easily by hitching a ride on clothing, boxes, shoes, luggage or other items.
- Bed bugs are a nuisance—they do not spread disease; however, their bites can produce strong allergic reactions and cause emotional distress.
- Bed bugs are becoming a more common problem due to increasing international travel and resistance to pesticides.
- Prevention is the most effective and inexpensive way to protect yourself from these pests.

What are the signs of bed bugs?

- It is difficult to find adult bed bugs since they are only active at night; also, they move quickly and can hide in very tight places such as cracks, crevices and seams of mattresses / box springs, bedding, cushions and furniture (particularly built-in), e.g. bed / desk / closet units.
- Signs of infestation, e.g. on bed sheets, include spots of blood from bites, clusters of droppings / feces (brown/black, pepper-like dots), eggs (whitish, size of a pinhead, in groups of 10–50) or actual live or dead bed bugs.

What are the symptoms of bed bug bites?

- Bed bugs inject saliva when they are feeding, causing a skin irritation and inflammation.
- If they are disturbed when feeding they may leave several bite marks at one site.
- Signs of a bed bug bite sometimes do not appear for up to 14 days after the actual bite.
- Some people do not react to the bites while others have local skin reactions and, occasionally, severe allergic reactions.
- Scratching the bites can cause a rash and swollen red welts.

What is the treatment for bed bugs?

- Try not to scratch the bites and keep the skin clean to prevent infection.
- Calamine lotion and antihistamines can help the itching. The bites should heal fairly quickly.

Who is at risk?

- Travellers are at risk from bed bugs, especially if staying in places with a high turnover rate.
- Individuals buying second-hand clothing or furniture, especially a mattress and box spring, should thoroughly examine items for signs of bed bugs before allowing them into their home.

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How do I protect myself from bed bugs when I am travelling?

Take measures to avoid bed bug bites and avoid transporting them in luggage and clothing:

Before you travel

- Consider bringing a large plastic trash bag to keep your suitcase in during hotel stays, along with smaller sealable bags to separate clothing you have worn / laundry from clean clothing, including your pyjamas.
- Carry a small flashlight to assist you with quick visual inspections.
- You may wish to treat your clothing / luggage with permethrin. Although permethrin is not available in Canada, travel health clinics can advise you how to purchase it and use it.
- Permethrin-treated clothing may give effective protection for 2 weeks or six washings.
- Visit health.gc.ca/consumer for advice on checking your room thoroughly for bed bugs.

While you are travelling

- Inspect your room for bed bugs before you bring in your luggage, if possible.
- Travellers who see evidence of bed bug activity should request a different room.
- Never unpack your suitcase. Remove clothing and personal items (such as toiletry bags and shaving kits) from the suitcase only when they are in use.
- Keep suitcases closed when they are not in use and try to keep them off the floor, e.g. on the luggage rack away from the bed / furniture or in the bathroom or shower stall.
- Carefully inspect clothing and personal items before returning them to the suitcase.
- To reduce the chance of eggs, nymphs or adult bed bugs escaping once you are at home, sort and seal bags of laundry so it is easier to place items right in the washing machine.

When you return home

- Place your luggage outside in the garage / porch and thoroughly inspect it, along with any un-bagged items, before you bring it to the laundry room.
- Wash all clothing on the hottest setting and dry for 30 to 45 minutes on high since hot temperatures should kill all stages of bed bugs.
- Dry clean any items that cannot withstand the heat; inspect carefully first.
- Place all of your clean clothes from your suitcase in the dryer on medium / high setting for 15 to 20 minutes, as extra insurance.
- Vacuum suitcases, backpacks and camera bags then wash with hot water using a scrub brush for the seams. Bag and throw out the vacuum bag in the outside garbage.
- For items that cannot be washed, bag them and place outdoors on hot sunny days.

What else do I need to know?

- If you think you may have bed bugs in your home, call a pest professional promptly since bed bugs are hard to get rid of.
- They will inspect your home, confirm whether or not there is an infestation, and provide advice on possible treatment. Only professionals should apply pesticides for bed bugs.
- When you are travelling, check the Bed Bug Registry or Trip Advisor online for reports of suspected bed bug infestations.

Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Healthy Environments Program at 613-966-5500 or 1-800-267-2803, ext. 677. | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | hpePublicHealth.ca

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