



# Preventing and Controlling Bed Bugs in the Workplace



## 1. What are bed bugs?



Bed bugs are parasitic insects that feed on blood. Adult bed bugs have flat, rusty-red-colored oval bodies and are about the size of an apple seed. They are big enough to be easily seen, but often hide in cracks in furniture, floors, or walls. When bed bugs feed, their bodies swell and become brighter red.

## 2. How and when do bed bugs feed?

Bed bugs prefer to feed at night, however, in an office environment they will adjust their pattern to feed when people are present. Bedbugs are attracted to carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) produced when people exhale (breathe out) and body heat. They can detect CO<sub>2</sub> from about three (3) feet and body heat from a lesser distance. Bed bugs prefer to be located close to their food source and quickly return to their hiding places after feeding. However, heavy infestations may force bed bugs to find hiding places farther away. Bed bugs usually feed once every 3-7 days. They can live up to several months without feeding.

## 3. Are bed bugs harmful?

Bed bugs are not known to transmit diseases. However, bed bug bites may be itchy, irritating, and may cause allergic reactions. In addition, working in an environment infested with bed bugs may cause anxiety and stress.

## 4. How does a workplace become infested with bed bugs? How do they spread?

There are two ways to get bed bugs – migration and hitch hiking. Migration is when bed bugs walk to an adjacent unit through hallways, plumbing, electrical lines, or other means. Hitch hiking is when bed bugs climb into or on bags, clothing, or other belongings and are relocated by a person.

## 5. What are the signs of a bed bug infestation?

- Blood stains, spots, streaks from crushed bugs on bed sheets
- Rusty or tiny block spots of excrement on sheets, mattresses, bed clothes, walls
- Eggs – when ready to hatch are the size of a piece of rice
- Egg shells/Shed skin



- An offensive sweet, musty odor when infestations are severe
- Bites on skin; pets scratching bites

## 6. What should workers do if bed bugs are seen at work?

- If you see any bed bugs, kill them immediately – preferably without use of pesticides. Catch them with sticky packing tape or crush them in paper towels. Bed bugs can be forced out of cracks and crevices with flat edged items such as a putty knife or an old subway or playing card.
- Report sightings to your supervisor and local PEF leader or Health & Safety Chair.
- Complete an unusual incident report.
- Work with the union to ensure a licensed professional exterminator is quickly brought in to conduct a thorough inspection. *Request copies of the pesticide label information or safety data sheets for all pesticides to be used.*
- Empty any personal bags (such as your purse or briefcase) and check thoroughly for bedbugs.
- When you get home change your clothes and put them in a dryer on high heat for at least 30 minutes.

## 7. What should be done to prevent and control bed bugs?



Agencies and staff should develop clear guidelines regarding risk reduction and prevention, the reporting of bed bugs, response procedures, and participation in treatment plans. A key component of treating bed bug outbreaks is the development of a communication plan to inform staff, cleaners, and others who may come in contact with a site where bed bugs have been identified.

Pesticides alone should not be used to control bed bugs. The most effective program for eliminating bed bugs is one that utilizes Integrated Pest Management (IPM). IPM is the use of all possible methods in a logical combination that minimizes risk of pesticide exposure to employees and the public, safeguards the environment, and maximizes effectiveness. Facilities should have a pest management plan in place to deal with pests, including bed bugs, before they become a problem.

### **IPM methods include:**

- **Inspect** areas suspected bed bugs were seen, plus surrounding work/living spaces
- **Correctly identify the pest**
- **Keep records**, including dates when and locations where pests are found
- **Clean** all items within a bed bug infested living area
- **Reduce clutter** where bed bugs can hide through storage and/or disposal of items
- **Eliminate** bed bug **habitats**
- **Physically remove** bed bugs through cleaning

- **Pesticide** use, careful and according to the label directions by a licensed professional
- **Follow up** inspections and possible treatment
- **Raise awareness through education on prevention of bed bugs**

A facility may need several cycles of inspection, cleaning, and pesticide use before bed bugs are fully eliminated. *IPM also includes prevention through education of clients, residents, facilities managers, and landlords.*

**The union(s) should be included in discussions on treatment plans to ensure workers are protected from exposure to pesticides and with minimal disruption.**

## 8. What can workers who make home/field visits do to protect themselves?

- Learn how to identify bed bugs
- When visiting, bring in only what you need and avoid placing bags close to walls and furniture (if this is unavoidable, place belongings in a closed white plastic kitchen bag and examine it for any bed bugs before leaving)
- If possible, stand rather than sit, or avoid sitting on furniture with fabric – wood or metal chairs are better
- Inspect shoes, clothing, and belongings after leaving
- If you find any bed bugs kill them immediately
- Put work clothes in the dryer for at least 30 minutes on high heat when you get home

## 9. On-line Resources

- NYC Department of Health  
<https://www.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/health-topics/bedbugs.page>
- Cornell University IPM site  
<https://cals.cornell.edu/integrated-pest-management/outreach-education/whats-bugging-you/bed-bugs>
- Department of Health  
<https://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/pests/bedbugs.htm>
- Centers for Disease Control (CDC)  
<https://www.cdc.gov/bed-bugs/about/index.html>
- EPA  
<https://www.epa.gov/bedbugs>



*Upon request, PEF Occupational Safety & Health will provide other factsheets, standards, regulations, and other resources. Contact us at [healthandsafety@pef.org](mailto:healthandsafety@pef.org) or 518-785-1900, ext. 254 or 1-800-342-4306, ext. 254.*

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