

Advice for parents about bed bugs

The following information was provided to our school/childcare by entomologists from the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and is based on the best scientific understanding of bed bug biology and control.

What are bed bugs?

Bed bugs are small, flattened, parasitic insects that feed solely on the blood of people and (rarely) other animals. Bed bugs are reddish-brown in color, wingless, range from about pinhead size to the size of an apple seed. They DO NOT live on people like lice, but hide in crevices during the day and emerge at night to feed. They can live several months without a blood meal. They cannot fly or jump, however they can run, and given enough time can spread through a home or apartment complex.



How do I know if my child or I have been bitten by a bed bug?

The bites of bed bugs are painless. Many people do not realize they have been bitten until bite marks appear anywhere from one or more days after the initial bite. Most people have no reaction to bed bug bites at all. Other people may have a reaction ranging from a bite similar to a mosquito bite to large, red welts that may itch and be irritating. The bite marks may be random or appear in a straight line. It is difficult for even a doctor to tell if a red, itchy spot on the skin is due to a bed bug bite.

Can my child or I get sick from bed bugs?

After many careful investigations, bed bugs are still not known to spread any diseases to humans. However, bite sites can become infected from scratching. And the emotional distress and worry from bed bugs can affect sleep and, possibly, health in some people.

How do you get bed bugs?

Bed bugs are experts at hiding. Their slim flat bodies allow them to fit into the smallest of spaces and stay there for long periods of time, even without a blood meal. Bed bugs are usually transported from place to place as people travel. The bed bugs travel in the seams and folds of luggage, overnight bags, folded clothes, bedding, furniture, and anywhere else they can hide. Occasionally bed bugs may be transported to another home or school in backpacks or clothing of a person who lives in an infested home. In most such instances the people involved do not realize that they may be transporting stow-away bed bugs.

Where are bed bugs found?

Bed bug infestations usually occur around or near the areas where people sleep. These areas include bedroom or living areas of apartments, shelters, rooming houses, hotels, and dorm rooms. They hide during the day in places such as seams of mattresses, box springs, bed frames, headboards, dresser tables, inside cracks or crevices, behind wallpaper, or any other clutter or objects around a bed. Bed bugs tend to live within a few feet of where people sleep, although they may travel as far as 20 feet at night to take a blood meal.

Do schools and childcare facilities get bed bugs?

Bed bug infestations are continuing to spread through our community so this means more people are living with bed bugs than ever before. Children living with bed bugs at home may occasionally bring bed bugs to school or childcare, especially if their backpacks or jackets are stored at home next to an infested bed or furniture. Because of this, it is increasingly common for schools and childcare facilities to experience one or more bed bug introductions a year.

What is the difference between a bed bug introduction and bed bug infestation?

A bed bug *infestation* can be thought of as a self-sustainable population of bed bugs. It consists of one or more feeding, breeding and egg-laying adults and their offspring. While it is possible for one or more individual bed bugs to be introduced via someone's belongings, it is highly unlikely for a bed bug *infestation* to be found in a childcare or school setting, apart from a dormitory situation. This is because bed bugs are best suited to survive where humans sleep, especially at night. The sustained pace of activity in our facility is not a good place for a bed bug to find an undisturbed meal. Nevertheless, we take all reports of bed bugs seriously. We want to minimize the chance of even a single bed bug biting a child or being brought home.

Does our school/childcare facility have a plan to deal with bed bugs?

We follow specific protocols when responding to bed bug sightings on students or in our facility. First, we employ a licensed pest control company that practices Integrated Pest Management (IPM), using the best and safest pest control strategy. The purpose of this IPM program is to control pests by relying mostly on non-chemical control methods. Only when deemed necessary by our company, as needed to maintain a safe and pest-free environment, will we authorize insecticide spray or dust treatments in our facility. Our professionals inspect and thoroughly vacuum all likely areas where bed bugs might hide. Finally we have a monitoring program designed to detect bed bugs in high risk areas of the facility. These things in combination with parent education and stepped up measures to prevent re-introductions should minimize the risk of any child being bitten or bringing home bed bugs.

What will happen to children found bringing bed bugs into the school/childcare?

It is our policy to not blame or deny service any child coming from a home with a bed bug problem. Should our staff become aware of a particular child who is bringing bed bugs to our facility, we will contact the parents and provide them with the same information we provide all parents about bed bugs. They will be advised to wash and dry their children's backpacks, jackets, etc. and store them in sealed bags or tubs when not in use. At our childcare facility, we will institute an isolation protocol for all children's belongings so as not to stigmatize or single out any particular child.

Will I be informed if there is a bed bug sighting?

Yes. When we become aware of a potential problem with bed bugs, we will send your child home with a notification letter stating what has been found and how parents can help.

What should I do if my child comes home with a notification letter?

Encourage your child to keep his or her backpack and coat isolated from other children's belongings as much as possible. During times of a problem at our facility it's a good practice to keep your child's childcare/school bags and coats out of their bedroom and away from the bed and couch. Another option is to store backpacks in sealed plastic bags or sealable Rubbermaid®-type container or plastic bin. Coats may be stored in a similar fashion. If you do suspect bed bugs in your student's belongings, placing the items in a dryer on hot setting for 30 minutes should kill all life stages of bed bugs.

How do I get rid of bed bugs if I have them in my home?

We recommend contacting a licensed pest control professional with experience in bed bug control. Do-it-yourself control can work, especially if bed bugs are caught early; however, using a professional if possible is generally better. Not all insects found in a home, even on a bed, are bed bugs. A professional can confirm whether any insects you find are indeed bed bugs.

Although it is highly unlikely for your child to bring home a bed bug, if you find a bed bug in your child's belongings, isolate the items and put them through the washer and dryer on the highest temperature settings. Cold, including placing in refrigerator freezers for short times, is not very effective at killing bed bugs.

We take great care with the selection and use of insecticides in our school/childcare facility. Likewise we urge parents to avoid excessive use of insecticides at home. The inappropriate or improper application of insecticides can increase the potential for illness in humans. Aerosol foggers are not at all effective at controlling bed bugs.

How can I learn more about bed bugs?

You can learn more about bed bugs and their control from the following resources provided by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension:

- The Insects in the City website has a page of information and links to important resources about bed bug control <http://citybugs.tamu.edu/factsheets/biting-stinging/bed-bugs/>
- One of the most important steps you can take should you encounter bed bugs at home is to find an experienced professional you can trust to eliminate the problem. This factsheet on How to Select a Bed Bug Control Provider (ENTO-033) will help you know how to interview a professional and understand your options. It also includes information to help an apartment manager better understand how to get the best from their pest control service provider. <http://www.agrilifebookstore.org/product-p/ento-033.htm>
- If you live in an apartment, the factsheet on Bed Bugs and Your Apartment (ENT-3013) explains bed bugs and answers the most common questions from apartment renters. <http://citybugs.tamu.edu/factsheets/biting-stinging/others/ent-3013/>
- For families that have trouble affording a professional, or who desire to take immediate measures before pest control service can be scheduled, Do-It-Yourself Bed Bug Control (ENT-3012) provides some practical suggestions to help everyone sleep better. <http://citybugs.tamu.edu/factsheets/biting-stinging/others/ent-3012/>
- For general information about integrated pest management in schools, including advice on dealing with bed bugs in school settings, see <http://schoolipm.tamu.edu/forms/public-health-pests-information-resources/>

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