



Bed Bugs: Managing the Itch Factor

The very idea of [bed bugs](#) may make you itchy, but that's about all bed bugs do; they don't spread disease. However, anyone can have an infestation of bed bugs. These insects don't discriminate by neighborhood or income. They are found in many places: homes, schools, shelters, hotels, movie theaters, and furniture rental outlets.

Bed bugs can cause property loss, can be expensive to remove, and are inconvenient. Getting rid of them takes time, patience, and resources. The best way to prevent bed bugs is to inspect regularly for them, bites, and signs of an infestation. Then act quickly if you notice any signs of bed bugs. Families living with an infestation will need ongoing support.

Questions about bed bugs in early childhood settings are common. Your program can create a science-informed approach to support families and staff with a bed bug sighting or infestation. Program staff may have questions about exclusion criteria, eradication methods, and "home visiting policies."

Understanding bed bugs will help inform program policies, procedures, and educational efforts.



National Center on
Health, Behavioral Health, and Safety

How to Spot a Bed Bug

Bed bugs can be hard to distinguish from other bugs. A bed bug is visible to the human eye. It's a small, flat, reddish-brown, wingless insect about the size of an apple seed. After feeding, they're darker and rounder. Your local health department or state cooperative extension service can help you identify your bug.

Look for signs of a bed bug infestation. Bed bugs are hard to find because they're active at night and hide during the day. It's important to look in common hiding places. Bed bugs hide in cracks, seams, and clutter that are close to areas where humans sleep or rest or where personal belongings are stored. Look in:

- Bed, crib, and cot frames
- Mattresses
- Pillows
- Cracks in the floor
- Electrical outlets
- Rugs
- Closets
- Cubbies
- Car seats
- School bus seats
- Under and behind upholstered furniture



Related Head Start Program Performance Standards

- Collaboration and communication with parents, [45 CFR §1302.41](#)
- Child health status and care, [45 CFR §1302.42\(c\)\(2\)](#)
- Safety practices, [45 CFR §1302.47\(a-b\)\(1\)\(ii\)](#)
- Management system, [45 CFR §1302.101\(a\)\(1-2\)](#)



An infestation means that bed bugs are living in the environment, reproducing, and feeding.

Bed bugs are great “hitchhikers.” They climb on shoes, bags, backpacks, purses, bedding, and clothes from an infested area and travel to their new environment. Backpacks, shoes, or clothing are common hiding places. A bed bug that moves to a new area can start an infestation.

During an infestation, the bugs like to cluster. You may notice their eggs, casings (transparent skin, shaped like a bed bug, which the bug has shed as it grows), and even feces or blood stains.

Bedbugs do not spread from person to person. They are not a sign that people are dirty. They do need to feed on people, but they may hide in belongings or clothes that allow them to spread to others in group care settings. They crawl at the speed of a ladybug.

- Healthychildren.org

What Programs Can Do

Set up clear policies.

Programs can engage their Health Services Advisory Committee, families, staff, pest management companies, and other stakeholders to create program policies and procedures and to find resources for staff and families.

Consider these questions when developing your bed bug policy:

- How will you identify the bugs?
- When will the facility take action if you find a bed bug?
- What will that action be? Consider:
 - Inspection and monitoring
 - Intensive cleaning
 - Laundering items that can be put in dryers
 - Isolation and containment of belongings
- How will you notify families?
- Who will contact a pest control service when bed bugs are an issue? Consider:
 - Using integrated pest management
 - Making sure the service uses the least toxic treatment
 - What is your policy if the problem continues to affect people or locations?
- How will you share information about bed bugs before and after they become an issue? Consider:
 - Using flyers or meetings
 - Keeping up positive relationships and communication
 - Keeping information about community resources easily available
 - Training staff to recognize a bed bug



Support families living with bed bugs.

A bed bug infestation is a huge burden for families. Getting rid of bed bugs needs persistent attention and cost. Work with families to come up with a strategy to keep sending their children to the program, manage bed bugs in the home, and keep bed bugs out of the classroom. Routinely educate all families on the prevention and treatment of bed bugs.

Families need special support when they have to cooperate with shelters, housing agencies, or landlords to remove bed bugs. Landlord laws vary across the country; know the laws for your community.

Top 10 Tips for Families

1. Don't panic.
2. Make sure you have bed bugs, not fleas, ticks, or other insects.
3. Think through your choices for treatment; don't reach at once for the insect spray.
4. Reduce the number of hiding places; clean up the clutter.
5. Wash and heat-dry your bed sheets and blankets often.
6. Do-it-yourself freezing is not always reliable for bed bug control.
7. High temperatures can kill bed bugs.
8. Don't pass your bed bugs on to others.
9. Reduce populations to reduce bites.
10. Turn to the professionals if needed.



Practice routine program maintenance.

Programs already do several tasks that improve their chances of avoiding a bed bug infestation.

Cleaning regularly and keeping personal belongings apart from one another help prevent a bed bug introduction from becoming an infestation. Inspecting sleeping areas and reducing clutter can help you find a problem early. Make the classroom a hard place for bed bugs to live.

Conduct daily health checks.

Train staff to know how to look for bed bug bites when they watch each child. The first hint of bed bugs could be a child scratching, or a bug bite. Bed bug bites are difficult to tell apart from other bites. Generally, the bites are small red bumps on the skin.

Sometimes several bites are in a line or a cluster. Look for skin changes such as a rash, swelling, bumps, or redness. A red mark may not appear for several days after the bite. Some people develop severe inflammation and swelling from the bite, while others don't react at all.

If you notice bites, follow program procedure by checking for other signs of bed bugs in the child's belongings and classroom. Speak with families, home visitors, or family service workers to try to find the source. It is possible the bites didn't start at home. They could be from a visit to an infested location such as a hotel, or a relative's or neighbor's home.

Prevent a bed bug sighting from becoming a larger problem.

Programs should have a policy for how to handle a bed bug sighting. Use your policies and procedures to

emphasize a calm and informed approach. The policy should include an education plan that all staff and families can understand.

Don't panic if a child introduces bed bugs. Children don't need to be excluded and shouldn't be stigmatized. Have a way to stop bed bugs at the door. This may involve keeping belongings in a plastic bag or having a second set of clothes. Bed bugs on clothes or backpacks are easily killed by drying in a dryer at the highest temperature for 30 minutes.

Use integrated pest management.

[Integrated Pest Management \(IPM\)](#) is not a single pest control method but several nonchemical and chemical strategies. IPM uses up-to-date information on the life cycles of pests and how and where they thrive. This information, combined with proper pest control methods, is used to control pests with the least possible harm to people, property, and the environment. Review [Bugged by Bugs?](#) and [Managing Pests in Child Care Centers Using IPM: Module 7](#) to learn more.

Share tips for home visitors.

Home visitors may have to enter infested homes. They don't want to bring any bed bugs to other homes, their car, or their own home. Change and launder clothes after a visit to a known infested environment. Home visitors can help families manage bed bugs by working with health staff, family service staff, and community partners. Home visitors should follow these practices to avoid carrying bed bugs from one home to another setting:

- Bring only what you need into the environment. Leave purses, bags, coats, etc., locked in the car.
- Don't place belongings on the floor or upholstered furniture.
- Choose furniture without pillows or upholstery if possible.
- Choose toys and materials that can withstand heat. Bag the toys after the visit. Then put them into a dishwasher or clothes dryer on high for at least 30 minutes.

Learn More

- [Dos and Don'ts of Pest Control](#)
- [Bed Bugs: Get Them Out and Keep Them Out](#)



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