
DC 37 Safety and Health Fact Sheet

Bed Bugs



Traditionally bed bugs were found only in homes and were seen only at night. But the new generation of bed bugs has spread to every conceivable location and can be seen walking across floors or furniture in broad daylight. Here are some facts you should know now if your workplace or job could expose you to bed bugs.

About bed bugs

Bed bugs are small, non-flying insects that feed on human blood. Adult bed bugs have flat, oval bodies that are rusty-red in color. Full-sized adults are about the size of an apple seed. Baby bed bugs, called 1st stage nymphs, are about the size of a poppy seed. Adults live for 6-18 months and can live for about a year without feeding. The full life cycle, from nymph to adult, takes 4-8 weeks. Bed bug eggs hatch in 7-10 days.

Although bed bugs are not yet known to spread disease, their bites can be extremely itchy and irritating. Bites can become infected from excessive scratching.

In the workplace

Although bed bugs are now found in all sorts of workplaces, schools and entertainment centers, they rarely breed in these areas. In most cases they simply hitchhike along until they find a good feeding ground – typically on or near a bed. Bed bugs usually feed at night when people are sleeping.

Champions at hiding, bed bugs can be difficult to find. Rust-colored stains, droppings and eggs on mattresses are an obvious sign, but finding bed bugs in work sites can be difficult. Bed bugs hide in cracks and crevices in furniture, including screw holes, as well as behind light switch

plates, smoke detectors, in baseboards, cubicle raceways and electrical outlets.

One way to find them is to swipe a credit card or MetroCard in cracks and crevices (do not do this in electrical outlets) to see if bugs come out. Upholstered furniture should also be carefully checked. Turn over chairs to look underneath at screw openings. Use a flashlight to check in darker areas. Trained dogs can sniff out the presence of bed bugs in hard-to-reach areas. However, there are no specific training requirements for these dogs, so it is important that a company with a good track record is used.

If you believe bedbugs are present in your work-site, notify your supervisor and/or facility manager immediately. If possible place the bed bug specimen in a well-sealed plastic bag so that a positive identification can be made. If, as part of your job, you enter a home or facility that you believe is infested with bed bugs, contact your supervisor immediately.

Treatment for bed bugs

Because people are so fearful of bed bug infestations, workers often want their employers to respond to possible bed bug infestations aggressively and quickly. While it is important to respond as fast as possible and to thoroughly treat the area, improper treatment can be more hazardous than the bed bugs themselves. Pesticides can be highly toxic. Foggers and bug bombs are **not** effective in eliminating bed bugs.

Two pesticide treatments are typically recommended – at initial sighting and again approximately two weeks later. However, public schools

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and public hospitals in New York City do not use pesticides.

In lieu of application of pesticides, bed bugs can be killed by excessive heat or cold. Placing items in a clothes dryer at 120°F for 30 minutes kills bed bugs and their eggs. Steam units can be used to reach bed bugs in nooks and crevices. Cold treatment is harder to use. Items must be stored for 1-2 weeks at temperatures below 0°F. Carbon dioxide (dry ice) can be used to flash freeze items.

The following steps should be taken by your employer if bed bugs are suspected to be present in your workplace:

- If possible confirm that the insect specimen is actually a bed bug. In DCAS-run buildings, DCAS has a protocol to identify specimens.
- Clear away clutter so that all suspect areas can be adequately inspected and treated.
- Inspect all areas carefully to determine the extent of bed bug infestation.
- Use the safest and most effective chemical pesticide possible to eradicate bed bugs. Pesticides should only be sprayed during off hours to limit worker exposure. If possible use steaming or freezing techniques to kill off bed bugs and eggs without the risks associated with pesticides.
- Follow up after the initial treatment to destroy any remaining bed bugs or viable eggs.
- Make sure cracks in plaster, loosened wall paper, and openings for pipes, wires and other utilities are sealed.

Protecting personal items

Workers who are concerned about bed bug infestation in their workplaces should consider storing personal items such as coats and handbags in sealed plastic bags during the workday. Keeping your workspace clutter free will leave bed bugs fewer places to hide and will make it easier for exterminators to reach all areas for thorough treatment. Workers who believe they may have been exposed to bed bugs in their workplace or who enter people's homes on a regular basis as part of their job should consider washing work clothes immediately upon returning home and drying them in a hot dryer for at least 30 minutes. For information on inspecting for and treating bed bugs at home, go to www.nyc.gov/bedbugs.

If you believe there is a bed bug infestation in your workplace, notify your supervisor and/or facility management immediately. If you believe your employer is not handling the situation properly, contact your union representative.

