



NATIONAL CENTER ON
Early Childhood Health and Wellness

BED BUGS: Managing the Itch Factor



The very idea of bed bugs may make you itch. But, that is about all bed bugs do. Bed bugs do not transmit disease. Anyone can experience an infestation. They do not discriminate by neighborhood or income. Bed bugs are found in many places: homes, schools, shelters, hotels, movie theaters, and furniture rental outlets.

According to [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), bed bugs, a problem worldwide, are resurging. The resurgence has caused property loss, can be expensive, and is inconvenient. Your program can create a science informed approach to supporting families and staff with a bed bug sighting or infestation. Families living with an infestation need ongoing support. Getting rid of bed bugs takes time, patience, and resources.

Questions about bed bugs in early education settings are common. Program staff ask about exclusion criteria, eradication methods, and home visiting policies. The best way to prevent bed bugs is to conduct regular inspections for bed bugs, bites, and signs of an infestation. Then act quickly if you notice any signs of bed bugs. Understanding bed bugs will help inform program policies, procedures, and educational efforts.

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 is a small, flat, reddish-brown, wingless insect about the size of an apple seed. After feeding they appear darker and rounder. The local health department or state cooperative extension service will be able to help you identify your bug.



Related Head Start Program Performance Standards:

- [1302.41](#)
- [1302.42\(c\)\(2\)](#)
- [1302.47\(a\)&\(b\)\(1\)\(ii\)](#)
- [1302.101\(a\)\(1\)&\(2\)](#)

Look for signs of a bed bug infestation. Bed bugs are hard to find because they are active at night. It is 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

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

An introduction occurs when a bed bug enters a bed bug free area by traveling on clothing, belongings, or shoes from an infested area. A bed bug that has been introduced to a new area could start an infestation.





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

A thorough investigation of the environment may not turn up any signs of an infestation. That doesn't mean bed bugs haven't been introduced into your setting. The bed bug you spotted may have been carried into the space. Bed bugs are great "hitchhikers"; they travel from place to place on belongings. Bed bugs can climb on shoes, bags, backpacks, purses, bedding, clothes to enter a new setting. Seams of backpacks, shoes or clothing are common hiding places.



WHAT PROGRAMS CAN DO

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

Consider these questions when developing your bed bug policy:

- How will you identify the bugs?
- At what point 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
 - Ensuring the least toxic treatment
 - What is your policy if the problem continues to affect individuals or locations?



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

- healthychildren.org

- How will you share information about bed bugs before and after they become an issue? Consider:
 - Using flyers or meetings
 - Maintaining positive relationships and communication
 - Keeping community resources readily 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 the bed bugs requires persistent attention and cost. Work with families to strategize how to continue 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 are dependent upon partnering with shelters, agencies or landlords to remove bed bugs. Landlord laws vary across the country; know the laws for your community.

Practice routine program maintenance: Programs already perform several tasks that improve their chances of avoiding a bed bug infestation.

Implementing regular cleaning procedures and keeping individual belongings separate help prevent a bed bug introduction from becoming an infestation. Inspecting sleeping areas and reducing clutter can help you identify a problem early. Make the classroom a hard place for bed bugs to live.

Tips for Home Visitors

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





Conduct daily health checks: Train staff to know how to look for bed bug bites when they observe each child. The first hint of bed bugs could be from observing a bite or a child itching. Bed bug bites are difficult to differentiate from other bites. Generally, the bites are small red bumps on the surface of the skin.

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

If bites are noticed, follow program procedure by checking for other signs of bed bugs in the child's belongings and classroom. Speak with families, home visitors, and/or family service workers to try to determine the source. It is possible the bites did not originate at home. They could have been from a visit to an infested location such as a hotel, 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.

Visiting an infested home: Home Visitors may have to enter infested homes. They do not want to bring any "hitchhikers" to other homes, their car or their own home. Change and launder clothes after a visit to a known infested environment. See "Tips for Home Visitors" and "Top 10 Bed Bug Tips for Families" for other ideas. Home visitors can help families manage bed bugs by working with health staff, family service staff and community partners.

Children living in infested homes: Don't panic if a child introduces bed bugs. Children do not need to be excluded and should not be stigmatized. Have a way to stop bed bugs at the door. This may involve keeping belongings in a plastic bag or providing a second set of clothes. Bed bugs on clothes or backpacks are easily killed by drying in a dryer set at the highest setting for 30 minutes.

Integrated Pest Management: [Integrated Pest Management \(IPM\)](#) is not a single pest control method but several non-chemical 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 appropriate pest control methods, is used to control pests with the least possible harm to people, property, and the environment.



Myth: Bed bugs live in dirty places.

Reality: Bed bugs are not attracted to dirt and grime; they are attracted to warmth, blood and carbon dioxide. However, clutter offers more hiding spots.

-EPA.gov

RESOURCES on ECLKC

- [Bugged by Bugs?](#)
[Try Integrated Pest Control Management \(IPM\)](#)
- [Play it Safe:](#)
[Reduce Your Child's Chances of Pesticide Poisoning](#)
- [Sanitation and Hygiene Services and Their Link to School Readiness](#)

Other Resources

- [Bed Bugs](#)
- [Bed Bugs and Home Visiting](#)
- [Bed Bugs: Get Them Out and Keep Them Out](#)
- [Bed Bug Bites](#)
- [Managing Pests in Child Care Centers Using Integrated Pest Management \(IPM\): Module 7- Dealing with Bed Bugs in Child Care Settings](#)
- [What Not to Do When You Have Bed Bugs](#)

Top 10 Bed Bugs Tips for Families

From the US Environmental Agency (EPA)

- Don't panic.
- Make sure you actually have bed bugs, not fleas, ticks or other insects.
- Think through your treatment options - don't immediately reach for the spray can.
- Reduce the number of hiding places - clean up the clutter.
- Frequently wash and heat-dry your bed sheets and blankets.
- Do-it-yourself freezing is not always reliable for bed bug control.
- High temperatures can kill bed bugs.
- Don't pass your bed bugs on to others.
- Reduce populations to reduce bites.
- Turn to the professionals, if needed



NATIONAL CENTER ON Early Childhood Health and Wellness

View other topics in the Embracing Health and Wellness Series on the Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center website: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/health-services-management/article/embracing-health-wellness-series>

Our Goal: To help Head Start and Early Head Start programs implement best practices and effective approaches within the areas of medical and dental care access, health awareness, healthy active living, emergency preparedness, and environmental safety to support healthy outcomes and school readiness for young children and their families.

Contact Us: The National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness welcomes your feedback as well as your suggestions for topics for future resources! Please forward your comments to: health@ecetta.info or call us at 888-227-5125

School readiness begins with health!