

BED BUGS AND OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns you have, and before you make any changes to your diet, lifestyle or treatment.

Employers have duties under the Occupational Health and Safety Act and its applicable regulations, including taking every precaution reasonable in the circumstances to protect the health and safety of a worker.

This fact sheet outlines precautions that employers and workers may take to protect themselves from occupational exposure to bed bugs.

WHAT WORKERS ARE AT RISK OF OCCUPATIONAL EXPOSURE TO BED BUGS?¹

Bed bugs can be found anywhere that humans live or visit, however, they are more commonly found in sleeping areas. Workers at risk include people who work in, or visit, locations with bed bug infestations, especially workers that handle bedding, clothing, or furniture where bed bugs could be hiding.

Workers potentially at higher risk include fire fighters, health care professionals, housing management and staff, police, and social workers that work in or visit:

- Hospitals
- Long-term care facilities
- Shelters and rooming houses
- Hotels and motels
- Residences (e.g. multiunit dwellings)

CAN I PICK UP BED BUGS BY TOUCHING SOMEONE IN AN INFESTED LOCATION?¹

No, bed bugs prefer to hide in cracks and crevices during the day and do not fly or jump onto people. It is rare for a bed bug to move directly from one person to another. Movement of bed bugs from one human to another is usually by direct contact with infested materials.

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF PICKING UP BED BUGS WHILE I AM WORKING?

- You can spread the infestation to other locations or to your central workplace
- You can spread an infestation to your home
- Your belongings or equipment can become infested
- Increased costs to yourself, your employer, and your clients

HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF FROM PICKING UP BED BUGS WHILE I AM WORKING?^{2, 3}

- When entering a potentially infested location, bring in only what you need and avoid placing items close to walls and furniture. Don't leave belongings on bedding materials, clothes, or furnishings.
- If you bring in belongings (e.g., computer bag or purse) place them in sealable plastic containers in centre of room.
- Do not handle bedding material or furnishings in sleeping areas unless required. Avoid sitting down on furniture or leaning on walls.

- If dealing with wheelchairs or stretchers, check these regularly for bed bugs.
- Consider changing into work clothes and shoes when arriving at work and removing them before going home (when there is a risk of infestation). Whenever possible workers should leave *work only* clothing at work and if possible do their laundry on site. Clothing items should be kept in a sealed plastic container (includes sealable plastic bags).
- If you discover your home has become infested, report the infestation to your supervisor or employer to allow other workers to take necessary precautions.
- In the case of a severe infestation and where you must enter a location, consider wearing hooded poly-propylene suits (coveralls), shoe covers, and gloves. NOTE: This kind of personal protective equipment (PPE) may not be appropriate in certain settings, or when working with certain patient or client populations.
- PPE use depends on what you are doing (i.e. handling potentially infested mattresses or furnishings) as opposed to just entering location to speak to clients or to administer services.

AS AN EMPLOYER, WHAT PRECAUTIONS CAN I TAKE TO PREVENT BED BUG INFESTATIONS AND TO PROTECT WORKERS?^{1, 2, 3, 4}

Precautionary measures that you take against bed bugs will vary based on the extent of an infestation, but include:

- Develop policies and procedures for reporting of bed bug infestations (on-site and off-site workplaces) by workers.
- Keep records of infestations, including details of where and when infestations were encountered and the extent of infestations.
- Provide education to all workers regarding bed bugs, including information on bed bug identification, signs of an infestation, and prevention awareness.
- Implement integrated pest management activities through a licensed pest management service provider.
- Provide coveralls, shoe covers, or gloves to workers if appropriate. Provide sealable plastic containers to protect workers' equipment or belongings. Allow time for workers to change clothing.
- Prepare laundering procedures for potentially infested work clothes. Provide a dedicated vacuum for removal of bed bugs from infested vehicles or equipment. Consider steam treatment of infested equipment or vehicles, under assistance of Structural licensed exterminator.

WHAT CAN I DO AFTER I LEAVE A POTENTIALLY BED BUG INFESTED LOCATION?

- Inspect your shoes, clothing, equipment, and other belongings after leaving. Shake clothing and shoes before entering any vehicle.
- If there are any concerns that you picked up a bed bug, remove clothing (on hard-floored surface) and seal in plastic bag.
- If you find a bed bug on you, kill it.

Resources to assist employers when developing bed bug policies and procedures:

1. Government of Ontario. [Bedbugsinfo.ca](http://bedbugsinfo.ca)
2. The Community Bed Bug Committee and WoodGreen Community Services. 2008. *The Bed Bug Resource Manual: A Guide to Preventing, Treating and Coping with Bed Bugs*
3. Gangloff-Kaufmann JJ, C Pichler. 2008. *Guidelines for Prevention and Management of Bed Bugs in Shelters and Group Living Facilities*
4. Government of Ontario. *Integrated Pest Management*
5. City of Toronto, Shelter, Support, and Housing Administration. 2008. *Bed Bugs – A Handbook for Shelter Operators*
6. National Center for Healthy Housing. 2010. *What's Working for Bed Bug Control in Multifamily Housing*
7. Toronto Public Health. *Bed Bug Resources*
8. Ontario Non-Profit Housing Authority. *Bed Bug Resources*