

Bed Bugs in Workplaces, Schools, Vehicles



Bed Bug Field Guide 
EduTechnologic, llc

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This document is an excerpt from the "Bed Bug Field Guide", an app for iOS and Android devices developed by the Ohio State University School of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences. This app covers a wide range of topics, including: Bed bug identification, inspection methods, prevention techniques, treatment strategies, travel tips, a sample Bed Bug protocol for workplaces, schools, and more.

This is a general guide intended for educational purposes. It should not be relied upon for legal advice.

Many people think of bed bugs as household pests or a problem that is specific to hotels. Unfortunately, bed bugs can be found anywhere people gather, even if there are no beds. Bed bugs have been found in office buildings, factories, schools, doctors' offices, hospitals, and even vehicles. Here is some advice to protect your workplace against bed bugs. Because this guide is written to be a general guide for diverse workplaces, some generalized terminology will be used.

- "Facility" encompasses any *physical workplace structure*, whether it is a building or vehicle, and regardless of commercial status.
- "Staff" includes all employees, volunteers, or others *who conduct work at the facility* on a regular basis.
- "Client" refers to *any non-staff visitor* to the facility, regardless of any financial exchange, and whether he/she is a customer, patient, student, bus rider, hotel guest, etc.

Workplace Considerations

Bed bugs at workplaces can cause considerable anxiety among staff and clients. There tends to be a continuing, although unnecessary, stigma attached to bed bugs and to the people struggling with infestations. There also may be concern (both reasonable and unreasonable) among staff about the possibility of bringing bed bugs home or the health effects of bites. Staff may fear being accused of or blamed for the bed bug problem. Employers may likewise be concerned about being held liable for bed bug-related problems affecting staff or clients. Nonetheless, silence is your worst enemy because it leads to speculation, and speculation then leads to distrust and panic.

It is best to plan in advance for the often upsetting issue of bed bugs. Before a bed bug introduction or infestation occurs, begin studying the issues, planning, and educating staff. The goal is to create an organizational culture in which bed bugs can be responded to effectively and without panic or misconceptions.

Introduction versus Infestation

The good news about bed bugs at workplaces is that a few stray bed bugs brought in as hitchhikers are unlikely to become an infestation; that is, the bed bugs are not likely to survive and breed in the facility. A sighting of a single bed bug should more properly be called an introduction. Furthermore, bed bug introductions rarely require treatment.

There are numerous reasons why bed bug introductions in facilities do not develop into infestations. For example, the single bed bug may be an adult male or a nymph (immature not yet capable of reproducing). In some cases, the solitary adult female may lack stored sperm and be unable to produce fertilized eggs without a male partner. If a very flat female adult is introduced, then she is less likely to still be producing live (viable) eggs than a more swollen female. This is because bed bugs tend to pair and mate as soon as a female finishes feeding and is swollen with blood (but she then quickly seeks an undisturbed site to digest the blood meal, so a very recently mated female is unlikely to be a hitchhiker).

Furthermore, bed bugs prefer to feed on a host who is sleeping quietly or sitting very still. A female bug needs a blood meal in order to obtain the necessary nutrients for egg production so a starved female no longer lays eggs. Most workplaces do not feature sleeping quarters, which makes it difficult for bed bugs to obtain regular meals needed for population growth. Nonetheless, if someone comes from a heavily infested home, numerous bugs can be hiding in their clothing or belongings and several may make their way into the facility. Even the presence of several bugs does not necessarily mean that treatment is required—consult with a PMP.

While the likelihood of bed bugs forming an infestation at most workplaces is rather small, there are exceptions in facilities with sleeping quarters such as nursing homes and daycare facilities. When there is a heavy infestation in such a facility, some bugs may hitchhike home with a person and start an infestation at their residence.

Bed Bug Sightings

Instruct staff not to crush or kill suspected bed bugs. Crushed bugs are more difficult, but not necessarily impossible, for insect experts to identify. Don't use tape because (1) the bug's underside cannot be viewed, and (2) a dissecting microscope will focus on the tape rather than the detailed features of an encased bug. Instead, the person sighting the bed bug should capture the bug by picking it up with an alcohol wipe (or something similar), place it and the alcohol wipe into a container, and take it directly to a designated contact person so it can be identified. Remember, there are many pests that can be mistaken for bed bugs (see "How to Identify Bed Bugs" in this app).

Isolated reports of "bed bug bites" should be taken seriously, but bite symptoms alone do not qualify as confirmation of bed bugs. Unless the bite victim saw an actual bed bug bite them, it is currently not possible to tell if a red, itchy welt is a bite from a bed bug or something entirely different. Many conditions mimic the appearance of bed bug bites, such as bites from mosquitoes and allergic reactions to carpet beetles (also see "Public Health Information" in this app). Reports of bites, particularly repeated complaints from many different people over a period of time, should trigger inspection and monitoring to determine the cause.

Education

Education is the best way to create an effective culture of bed bug prevention and response at your facility. All staff should be briefed on the basics of bed bug identification, biology, and control. Education also should include protocols for capturing suspected bed bugs and for reporting bed bug sightings. To reduce panic and anxiety, emphasize the difficulty of bed bugs creating an infestation at a workplace. When all staff are calmly on alert for bed bugs in the workplace, it is more likely an introduced bed bug will be caught quickly. If you serve clients at your facility who may be concerned about bed bugs, consider letting them know that you have a plan in place and what, if anything, they can do to help (for example, report any suspected bed bug in the facility; take precautionary measures if they have an in-home infestation).

Ensure all staff members have access to resources, such as this app, to help them prevent and treat bed bug infestations in their own homes. This will help ease fears about bringing bed bugs home from work. In addition, reducing the number of staff who have infestations will in turn minimize the number of bed bug introductions into the workplace.

Create a Bed Bug Protocol

Your bed bug protocol should outline what should happen in the event of a bed bug sighting. The plan should include:

- Education and preventative measures before a bed bug sighting.
- Instructions for capturing, preserving, and reporting any suspected bed bug.
- A designated pest management professional (PMP) who will handle all bed bug work, including identification, inspection, monitoring, and/or treatment, as necessary.
- A designated staff member who will be responsible for promptly contacting the designated PMP and gathering documentation about bed bug sightings (see details below).
- A list of people in the company whom the designated staff member should contact.
- Responsibilities of individuals in various departments.

The designated staff member ideally should be familiar with the basics of bed bug identification (see "How to Identify Bed Bugs" in this app). If a sample is suspected a bed bug, the designated staff member should document the sighting in as much detail as possible, including:

- Name of person who reported the bug.
- Where the bug was found (as specific as possible—for example, “under upholstered red chair in southwest corner of break room 103” instead of simply “room 103”).
- What date and time the bug was found.
- Whether the bug was alive or dead at time of capture.
- Whether the bug was found singly or with others.

This detailed documentation along with the suspected bed bug should be provided to the PMP since such information will help guide their monitoring/treatment plan. The PMP should report their identification findings to the designated staff member.

The designated staff member should have an agreed-upon list of contacts within the company to whom they are empowered to report any bed bug(s); this can include facilities management, human resources, environmental health and safety, legal, or any other relevant departments, based on the workplace's specific needs.

The departments further down the reporting chain should coordinate with one another to take further steps. Responsibility for additional steps should be decided beforehand. Further steps may include, but are not limited to:

- Coordination between the PMP and facilities staff to arrange periodic building-wide inspection(s) and/or a monitoring program, if deemed necessary.
- Re-evaluation and revision of the bed bug prevention protocol as warranted.