

IPM IN SCHOOLS



Adult Common Bed Bug (*Cimex lectularius*) with ruler. [Photo by CDC](#), Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

Bed Bug Stigma

If a bed bug is found on a child, use discretion. Calmly and quietly follow IPM steps to prevent bed bug hysteria.

There is no need to send a child home. Bed bugs are not known to spread any human diseases, and schools can treat affected items with heat right away.

Protect the privacy of students and staff. Bed bugs can cause a loss of sleep and increased stress. Bed bugs can also be associated with negative social stigma. Do not send out broad notices.

For information, see the [Infectious Disease Control Guide for School Staff \(PDF\)](#).

Key Points

Bed bugs are oval, rust colored, parasitic insects that feed on people. They are about the size of an apple seed as adults. Eggs look like tiny grains of white rice and are about one millimeter long. Bed bugs go through several stages: egg, five nymphal stages, and adult. You may see any or all life stages.

Bed bugs don't discriminate. People of all socioeconomic levels, housing types, races, colors, and religions are equally susceptible. Bed bugs can be found in a variety of dwellings, but they can be particularly problematic in multi-family housing like apartment buildings. Bed bugs like to hide in dark crevices like mattress creases or backpacks. They prefer to feed at night.

Bed bugs are not known to transmit any human diseases. However, they can cause local skin reactions, allergies, secondary infections, and poor sleep. Bed bug bites cause small, raised red bumps. Most people don't notice being bitten, but the bites can become very itchy or painful. Bed bug bites can take up to two weeks to produce a reaction. Some people may have no reaction at all.

Schools can be ideal environments for bed bugs to spread. They easily hitchhike from student to student by hiding in their belongings. They don't fly or jump.

Remain calm. In most cases, schools will find one or two bed bugs on clothing or a backpack. Place affected items in a clothes dryer on the hottest temperature setting for at least 30 minutes. This will kill all life stages. Finding a single bed bug does not mean a building is infested. For infestations, call a pest management professional.

What is Integrated Pest Management (IPM)?

IPM is a way to manage pests that focuses on prevention. IPM can achieve long-term pest prevention and control with minimal impact on human and environmental health. The key steps of IPM are: (1) **Inspect**; (2) **Identify** the problem or pest; (3) Take appropriate **Action**; and (4) **Evaluate** the results. Pest prevention requires communication and education so that staff are aware of conditions that attract pests and know how to minimize them. Ask staff to make minor changes to habits for appropriate sanitation, proper food storage, and clutter reduction.

For more information, ask about your district's pest management plan and IPM policy.

Control the Spread

- **If you suspect a bed bug on a student**, discreetly remove the student from class. Have a nurse or a qualified individual examine clothes and belongings. See [Cornell's webpage with photos](#) for bug ID. Freeze the bug in a sealable plastic bag and have a pest management or extension professional confirm ID.
- **There's no need to send a student or staff member home.** Notify the affected student's parent or guardian. Keep identities private. Suggest resources on treatment in homes. Offer to connect family to community resources.
- **If you find multiple bed bugs in a classroom**, call your pest management professional right away. Notify parents or guardians of students in the class.
- **Heat affected clothing and heat-tolerant items** in a clothes dryer on the hottest temperature setting for at least 30 minutes. Do this at school if you can provide a change of clothes or send instructions home for the parent or guardian.
- **Thoroughly clean the area** where a bed bug was found. Vacuum or steam clean carpeting, crevices, and furniture. Double-bag and put vacuum bags in the outdoor trash right away. Heat fabric items in a dryer, then wash and dry again.
- **Seal personal items in plastic containers.** Use lidded totes or sealed plastic bags for each student.
- **Chemicals should only be applied by a licensed pest management professional.** Bug bombs or foggers are not effective and NEVER recommended.
- **Monitor the classroom**, areas with personal belongings, and storage areas.
- **For more**, see [Bed Bug Action Plan for Schools, Virginia Tech](#) and [Bed Bug Protocol for Schools, Insects in the City](#).



Adult bed bugs, shed nymph skins, and eggs under a mattress seam. [Photo by Charlysays](#). Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

Prevent the Spread

- **Develop a Written Action Plan.** See [Sample Protocol, North Carolina School IPM Program \(PDF\)](#).
- **Have contact info ready** for your [pest management professional](#) with bed bug experience.
- **Educate.** Teach all staff to identify a bed bug. Give parents bed bug information like [Cost-Effective and Money-Wasting Bed Bug Control Methods, Rutgers](#).
- **Put items from home in sealed plastic containers.**



Example plastic storage bin with lid and clear view inside.

- **Eliminate clutter.** Clutter provides shelter. Reduce anything unmoved in the last year by half.
- **Seal cracks and crevices.** Inspect furniture and storage areas weekly.
- **Remove upholstered furniture.** Pick furniture with easy-to-clean surfaces and few crevices.
- **Minimize fabric items.** Launder pillows, blankets, rugs, and mats regularly. Dry on high.
- **Vacuum carpeted areas regularly.** Address corners, behind furniture, and along walls.
- **Look for bed bugs regularly.** Focus on lost and found piles, donations, and storage areas.
- **Follow normal cleaning steps.**

More Information

Bed Bugs in Schools Guidance for Administrators, Teachers and Staff, U.S. EPA

www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2016-07/documents/bed-bug-guidance-for-school-administrators-teachers-staff.pdf

Insect ID, Washington State University Extension Service

<https://puyallup.wsu.edu/plantclinic/insect-identification/>

Washington DOH

- doh.wa.gov/bedbugs
- doh.wa.gov/schoolipm
- [Email: schoolehs@doh.wa.gov](mailto:schoolehs@doh.wa.gov)

Oregon State University Extension Service

extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/pub/pnw-756-bed-bugs-classroom

The National Pesticide Information Center (NPIC) provides objective, science-based information about pesticides and related topics to enable people to make informed decisions.

- npic.orst.edu
- npic.orst.edu/battling-bedbugs.html

Environmental Protection Agency: Managing Pests in Schools

- www.epa.gov/ipm/introduction-integrated-pest-management
- www.epa.gov/bedbugs

Written in collaboration with

Alexandra Boris, WA DOH

Liz Dykstra, WA DOH

Jacoby Clark, PHEFA Fellow

Thank you to Jennifer Snyder, Oregon State University School IPM Program, for the original content of this guidance.