



## MIDWEST PESTICIDE ACTION CENTER

# BED BUGS IN SCHOOLS AND CHILDCARES

## *Information and Actions for Prevention and Control*

Pest control is always a challenge in spaces used by large numbers of people such as schools and childcares. The control of bed bugs is no exception. However, there is important information regarding their habits that can be used both to control bed bugs within a school or childcare building and prevent it from becoming a hub for spreading bed bugs to the homes of families and staff.

### BASIC BED BUG FACTS

1. Bed bugs are a growing problem worldwide, seeing exponential growth in the past 10 years.
2. Adults are visible with the naked eye – about the size, shape and color of an apple seed.
3. They do not jump or fly. The way they get around is to crawl or hitchhike on moveable objects.
4. They **ONLY** feed on blood – sanitation is not an issue.
5. They like to hide in folds of fabric, seams of upholstered items, and cracks and crevices closest to sleeping areas.
6. They are most active at night but only because that's when most of us sleep. If we sleep during the day they will be active then as well.
7. They do not transmit diseases from animal to human nor from person to person.
8. Anyone can get bed bugs.

### WHAT ARE THE CONCERNS?

Bed bugs do not like living in a school or childcare facility. They prefer to be in structures where people sleep at night. The main concern for these spaces is the transfer of bed bugs from child to child, child to structure, structure to staff, etc. Bed bugs are notorious stowaways and may hitch a ride in or on bags, clothing, books, and other items, so they are easily brought to and from infested places. Here are some basic steps schools and childcares can do to help control bed bug transfers.

### BE PROACTIVE

#### □ Educate everyone.

- Educate faculty, children/students, and parents about bed bugs **before** they become a problem. Download MPAC's factsheet from [www.midwestpesticideaction.org](http://www.midwestpesticideaction.org).
- Discourage and limit unnecessary cloth items being brought from home to the facility such as blankets, pillows, and dress-up clothes.
- Foster sensitivity among faculty, children, and parents in case bed bugs do become a problem, either in the facility or a home—bed bugs are often **incorrectly** associated with bad sanitation.
- Explain what your facility is doing to prevent and control the bed bug problem.

#### □ Keep it clean.

- Keep all areas as uncluttered as possible.
- Store all student and staff personal items separately in sealed plastic containers when possible.
- Clean regularly, paying extra attention to lost-and-found areas, upholstered furniture and/or bedding, wall mounted items (e.g. clocks, pictures, mirrors, etc.) and bookcases.
- Purchase and dedicate equipment for bed bug control, including vacuums and steam cleaners (steam must heat to at least 170°F). Empty and discard bags or collecting containers immediately. Clean and maintain the equipment regularly.
- Regularly wash and heat-dry all bedding, dress-up clothing, or other items for at least 20 minutes (most 'dry-clean only' items can be put in the dryer as long as they are dry).
- Regularly inspect the facility: be careful and methodical using care to avoid spreading bed bugs to other areas.

#### □ Maintain the building to prevent pest problems.

- Bed bugs like to hide in cracks and crevices so... seal cracks, crevices, and moldings with paint or caulk; secure loose tiles; remove carpeting when possible; repair holes, peeling wallpaper, and chipping paint.
- Fix storage and clutter issues in common areas. Store items (e.g. bags, blankets, toys, coats, books) in sealed plastic containers when possible.
- Train key employees, such as maintenance staff and teachers, so they know procedures for reducing the risk of infestation and transportation of bed bugs and what to do if bed bugs are discovered.

## WHAT TO DO...

### If you find bed bugs on a person or belongings

This situation often indicates that there is a problem with bed bugs at home. Here's what to do:

- Capture the bed bug, if possible, and store it in a sealed container for positive identification by a qualified pest control professional.
- Inspect the area and other items for the presence of bed bugs.
- Inform the student's family that a bed bug was found. Provide them with as much bed bug information as possible, and answer all questions. Respect the family's privacy.
- Inform all other families and staff that a bed bug was found so that they can heighten their awareness and protect themselves.
- Increase vigilance and facility/room inspection for bed bugs.
- Increase vigilance on those persons and their belongings suspected of bringing bed bugs into the facility.

### If you find bites

Bed bug bites are very difficult to distinguish from most other types of bug bites and most people don't react to the bites. Bed bug bites are usually multiple and arranged in a semi-circle or line on the face, neck, arms and legs. Treat a suspected bed bug bite like any other: clean the area well, apply an antiseptic, and monitor for infection. Skin creams containing corticosteroids and oral antihistamines may be advised in the presence of itching or allergic reaction. More severe reactions should be treated in consultation with a medical professional.

### If an infestation at a childcare or school is suspected

In addition to all the preventative measures listed, it is recommended that the facility hire a pest control company experienced in Integrated Pest Management (IPM) to address a suspected infestation. Do not hire a company based on price alone; make sure the company is qualified to do the job right to avoid future headaches. Here are some tips for choosing a pest control company for bed bug control:

- Make sure they are licensed and insured.
- Ask for and check references for bed bug work.
- Never begin treatment until an inspection with positive identification of bed bugs is completed.
- Insist on an IPM approach.
- Ask for a detailed action plan that recommends pre-treatment preparation activities (e.g. clutter reduction, cleaning, laundering).
- Beware of the lowest bidder; shop around.
- Beware of any "guarantees." No reputable pest control company will guarantee their work for longer than 30 days.
- Notification of parents and staff is required before using any broadcast pesticide including sprays and dusts. Please read the box titled 'Bed Bugs and Pesticides.'
- Be present as much as possible when inspection and treatment are being done to ensure the contract is being fulfilled.

## Should A Child Be Sent Home?

Bed bugs do not carry disease. For this reason, students suspected of bringing in bed bugs should not be required to leave school or stay home. Missed school days can impact a student in many ways that limit the ability to achieve. Control and treatment for bed bugs may take many weeks, making forced expulsion of students impractical. Increased awareness and vigilance is required, punishment is not.

## PESTICIDE USE

Illinois law requires public schools and licensed childcares to stop routine pesticide spraying and use Integrated Pest Management (IPM) for all pest control. IPM is a proven method of pest control that emphasizes simple, practical, and inexpensive prevention practices that cause the least harm to people and the environment. The law also requires schools to notify parents and staff before pesticides are applied. For more information about IPM please visit our website at [www.spcpweb.org/schools](http://www.spcpweb.org/schools).

Bed bugs and especially their eggs are resistant to most pesticides. Since childcares and schools act as a transfer point (i.e., moving bed bugs from one home to another), it is most effective and safer to focus on preventing this transfer through education, building maintenance, and people management. If bed bugs do become established in a building, treatment may be necessary. Effective treatment usually includes using heat through steam and other methods, sometimes coupled with the conservative use of pesticides in cracks and crevices. Only use pesticides labeled for bed bug control, and always remember to follow the law when used.

### Information taken from:

University of Arizona College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Pest Press, "Bed Bugs Go To School," January/February 2007

[www.clermonthelthdistrict.org/BedBugSchoolDayCare](http://www.clermonthelthdistrict.org/BedBugSchoolDayCare)

[www.michigan.gov](http://www.michigan.gov) "Bed Bugs: What Schools Need to Know"

[www.emedicine.medscape.com](http://www.emedicine.medscape.com) "BedBug Bites: Treatment & Medication"

**Midwest Pesticide Action Center is a not for profit organization dedicated to reducing the health risks and environmental impacts of pesticides and promoting safer alternatives in Illinois.**

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