

# Bed Bug Guide

for Schools

Learn what to do... to keep  
bed bugs out of your school.



## Background

Bed bugs are no longer an uncommon sight in Manitoba. They have become a widespread problem we all must address, including schools. While Health Canada does not consider the bed bug a health hazard, these tiny, biting “nuisance pests” are capable of causing irreparable damage to a person’s reputation and quality of life. This is especially true among students, whose self-esteem often rests on fitting in and not attracting negative attention.

## Just the Facts

### What are bed bugs?

They are flat, brown insects, about the size of an apple seed. They feed on human blood and usually bite people at night while they’re sleeping. Bed bugs cannot fly or jump.

### What do bed bug bites look like?

They appear as red bumps (usually several in a row), or rashes, on the skin and are very itchy. Bites usually occur around the face, neck, upper body, arms and hands.

### Are bed bugs a health hazard?

There is no evidence that bed bugs spread disease (under The Public Health Act, bed bugs do not have to be reported) – however, repeated scratching can cause secondary skin infections. As well, the rare person will experience an allergic reaction.

### Where are bed bugs found?

They’re commonly found in areas where people sleep, or sit, for long periods of time. Bed bugs prefer an environment where they can hide during the day and feed on a sleeping person at night. Look for bed bugs in folds or seams of mattresses, box springs, chairs and couches; around headboards and bed frames; behind baseboards; and under area rugs or along edges of carpeting.



*A student, or other individual, should not be barred from the school or sent home if he/she has a suspected or confirmed case of bed bugs. Schools should not close as a result of finding bed bugs, unless short-term closure is necessary for a bed bug treatment – as directed by a licensed, professional exterminator.*

## Signs Your School May Have Bed Bugs

Look for the following signs:

- unexplained bite marks or welts on students, or others, at the school
- live or dead bed bugs
- a musty or sweet odour (mainly occurs with very large bed bug infestations)
- spots of dried blood, or bed bug droppings, on bedding, mattresses or box springs (This mainly applies to nursery and kindergarten, where children have nap times.)



## No Link: Between Bed Bugs and Cleanliness

Having bed bugs in your school does not mean the place is unclean or poorly kept. Bed bugs can enter the school on clothing, blankets, lunch boxes, stuffed toys or other items that travel from one place to another. Even if a bed bug is found in a child's belongings, it doesn't necessarily mean the bug came from that child's home. He/she could have picked it up from a classmate, school bus, carpool, or any number of people or things travelling to and from the school.

## What You Need to Know

If bed bugs are not properly treated at the source of the infestation, by professional exterminators, there is a risk of carrying these pests into homes, schools or other public places.

***Early detection and treatment is the best way to stop the spread of bed bugs.***

## What Schools Can Do

### 1. Prevent bed bugs from entering your school.

Bed bugs usually enter schools on the clothes or belongings of students, staff, volunteers or visitors. While the bugs may come from these individuals' homes, it is also possible they picked them up from classmates, transportation vehicles or some other source on their way to school.

What *you* can do to keep your school free of bed bugs:

- **Keep an eye on backpacks, clothing, blankets** and other personal items students bring into the school. Watch for any signs of bed bugs.
- **Discourage families** from sending blankets or stuffed animals with their children, if possible.

- **Carefully inspect all second-hand or donated items** for signs of bed bugs before they are brought into the school (ex: books, stuffed animals, costumes, furniture). Lost-and-found items should also be routinely inspected.
- If you suspect bed bugs in clothing or cloth items, **run them through the dryer for 20 minutes on high heat. This should kill all stages of bed bugs.**
- When possible, **keep each student's belongings separate** by storing their coats, clothing, and personal items, in individual lockers or cubby holes. **Sealed plastic bags, or containers, can be used for extra clothing** or cloth items.
- **Vacuum daily**, paying close attention to places bed bugs like to hide (ex: along baseboards, around carpet edges). **Dispose of vacuum bags/waste** in an outside garbage container **immediately** after vacuuming.

## 2. Ensure all staff can identify bed bugs and signs of infestation.

### School administrators should:

- Make sure **all employees, including cleaning staff, are trained** to recognize bed bugs and signs of infestation – both in the school and on students' items.
- **Share information in this guide** with all staff, emphasizing the key signs of bed bug infestation (ex: discovery of actual insects, cast-off skins or droppings, excessive insect bites on students/others).
- **Post** bed bug fact sheets **on school bulletin boards** for students, visitors and community users.

## 3. Have a plan to deal with bed bugs if they're found in your school.

In the event that bed bugs are discovered in your school, it is essential for you to have an effective response plan in place. This plan can be tailored to the needs of your school; however, it should align with the strategies suggested in this publication – in particular, the guiding principle that states: ***Affected students must NOT be excluded from school programs or sent home.***

Your response plan should also follow these procedures:

- ☐ *If a student is suspected of having **bed bug bites**:*
  - Immediately contact the student's parents/guardians and tell them they suspect their child has bed bug bites.
  - Provide the family with educational materials. (*See the list of online resources at the end of this document.*)
  - Search the school for any other signs of bed bugs.
- ☐ *If a suspected **bed bug is found on a student or in the school**:*
  - (If the suspected bed bug was found on a student or his/her belongings), meet with the student privately, away from other students, so you can examine the student's clothing and personal items for bed bugs.
  - Put any bugs you find in a **sealed container for identification.**
  - Contact a licensed, professional exterminator, or public health inspector, to identify the bugs. **You must make sure the insects you found are bed bugs.**

□ If you've **confirmed** that **bed bugs are in your school**:

- You must seek treatment for a possible bed bug infestation, *when*:
  - you find **more than one type of evidence** that your school has bed bugs (ex: seeing the actual bugs, the cast-off bed bug skins, droppings or dried blood spots).
- **Discreetly examine** the area where the bed bugs were found (search clothing, belongings, etc.) to help you determine which child might have brought the bed bugs to the school.
- Notify parents that bed bugs are suspected at the school, but not yet confirmed. (*See Appendix for a sample letter.*)
- Ask parents to limit the belongings students bring into the school, such as blankets and stuffed animals.
- Fully inspect other belongings, such as backpacks and clothing, before the child enters the school.
- Thoroughly examine your school for any additional evidence of bed bugs and report your findings to the public health inspector to determine if treatment is required.

**NOTE:** You can call the provincial **Bed Bug Hotline** at **1-855-3MB-BUGS / 1-855-362-2847** to be connected to a public health inspector.

- Contact a licensed, professional exterminator for treatment. A licensed exterminator will know about the different products and techniques available to get the best results. Many exterminators now use heat treatment to kill bed bugs instead of, or combined with, chemical treatment.
- **Follow** the pest-control company's advice and recommendations **exactly and completely**.
- **Inform parents/guardians** of students attending the school, and **all staff**, that bed bugs have been confirmed. (*See Appendix for a sample letter.*)  
YOU MUST MAINTAIN CONFIDENTIALITY. YOU CANNOT SHARE THE NAMES OF ANY STUDENTS, FAMILIES OR STAFF WHO MAY OR MAY NOT HAVE BROUGHT BED BUGS INTO THE FACILITY.
- **Notify your superintendant** and **public health inspector** to let them know bed bugs have been confirmed and **treatment is being carried out**.
- **Provide educational materials** to all families and staff. (*See the list of online resources at the end of this guide.*)
- **Continue to limit belongings** that are brought from students' homes into the school, including blankets, stuffed animals and backpacks.
- If mattresses are used in the school, consider **sealing** the mattresses with **bed-bug-proof mattress covers**.
- After your school has been treated for bed bugs, you must **continue to monitor the facility** for any signs of bed bugs. This is to make sure the treatment worked and to prevent a reoccurrence.



### *If a specific student is suspected of introducing bed bugs to the school:*

- ❑ Remember that bed bugs entering the school on a specific student, or other person, **may not have come from that student's or other person's home**. Bed bugs can be picked up in many places (ex: buses, taxis), so you should be sensitive when talking to parents/guardians.
- ❑ Ask all parents/guardians to store their children's freshly washed clothes in sealed plastic bags until the children put them on in the morning.
- ❑ Ask all parents/guardians to store items going back and forth from school (ex: clothes, backpacks, lunchboxes) in sealed plastic containers when at home, to keep bed bugs from getting into them.
- ❑ Ask parents/guardians of the affected child (the child with bites or some other sign of bed bugs) to send a spare set of clean clothing sealed in a plastic bag for the child to wear at school. The student can change into the clean clothes and you can place the student's travel clothes into the sealed bag.
- ❑ Store the affected student's belongings in sealed plastic bags or bins to stop the spread of bed bugs to other student's belongings.
- ❑ If you think a family may be having trouble dealing with bed bugs in their home (ex: a student continues to show signs of bed bug bites or brings bed bugs into the school), consider suggesting other resources and services to help the family.

For example, you could refer the family to a public health nurse or a public health inspector. If the family lives in rental housing, you may want to refer them to landlord/tenant services.

## What funding is available to treat or prevent bed bugs?

Schools are responsible for dealing with bed bug infestations, including any costs related to treatment and prevention.

The Bed Bug Prevention Materials Program provides bed bug prevention supplies to “qualifying organizations” at a reduced cost, through the Manitoba Distribution Agency (MDA). Materials available through this program include:

- bed-bug-proof mattress and box spring covers
- insect monitors and record-keepers
- insect interceptor traps
- dissolvable laundry bags
- bed bug warning stickers
- clear-view bed bug monitors
- educational handouts



## Appendix:

### Parent Notification Letter for Confirmed Case of Bed Bugs

(School Logo)

(insert date)

Dear Parent(s) / Guardian:

A bed bug was recently found in your child's class.

Bed bugs are small, brown wingless insects that feed on blood. Bed bug bites may look like red bumps or rashes on the skin and can be very itchy. These bites are usually found on the face, neck, upper body, arms and hands. Bed bugs are NOT a health risk – there is no evidence they spread disease – however, repeated scratching can cause secondary infections, and the rare person can experience an allergic reaction.

It's important to understand that having bed bugs does not mean the home, school or public place is unclean or poorly kept. These bugs can travel on items like clothing, backpacks and lunchboxes, or can be picked up on buses or taxis – anything that travels to and from the school.

**As a precaution, we are asking parents to limit what students bring into the school (ex: blankets, stuffed animals) and to thoroughly inspect all other belongings, such as backpacks and clothing, for bed bugs before your child leaves and/or returns from school.**

**PLEASE NOTE: *Students affected by bed bugs will NOT be excluded from school programs or sent home. Schools will not close, unless short-term closure is required for a bed bug treatment by a licensed professional.***

The school is currently working with the public health system to manage the situation and prevent any further occurrences in the school.

For more information on bed bugs, go to the Manitoba government website at [www.manitoba.ca/bedbugs](http://www.manitoba.ca/bedbugs), call the **Bed Bug Hotline** at 1-855-362-2847 (7:30 am to 4:30 pm., Monday to Friday), or email [bedbugs@gov.mb.ca](mailto:bedbugs@gov.mb.ca).

If you have questions about bed bugs in the school, please contact (name, contact info).

Sincerely,

(name of principal)

## For further information contact:

### The Manitoba Government Bed Bug Hotline

**Phone:** 1-855-3MB-BUGS  
(1-855-362-2847)  
7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday

**E-mail:** [bedbugs@gov.mb.ca](mailto:bedbugs@gov.mb.ca)

**Website:** [www.manitoba.ca/bedbugs](http://www.manitoba.ca/bedbugs)

## Online Resources

Manitoba Government:  
[www.manitoba.ca/bedbugs](http://www.manitoba.ca/bedbugs)

Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA):  
[www.wrha.mb.ca/healthinfo/a-z/files/BedBugs.pdf](http://www.wrha.mb.ca/healthinfo/a-z/files/BedBugs.pdf)

City of Winnipeg:  
[www.winnipeg.ca/cms/bugline/insect\\_information/bedbugs.stm](http://www.winnipeg.ca/cms/bugline/insect_information/bedbugs.stm)

Government of Ontario:  
[www.bedbugsinfo.ca](http://www.bedbugsinfo.ca)

Michigan Manual for the Prevention and Control of Bed Bugs:  
[www.michigan.gov/documents/emergingdiseases/Bed\\_Bug\\_Manual\\_v1\\_full\\_reduce\\_326605\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/emergingdiseases/Bed_Bug_Manual_v1_full_reduce_326605_7.pdf)

This guide is available in different formats upon request.