



Advice for Field Staff Who May Come Into Contact with Bed Bugs during Flood Response

Minnesota Department of Health and University of Minnesota Extension

Introduction: Bed bug infestations are among the potential hazards that may be encountered by people responding to floods. Building and business facility inspectors, health workers, maintenance and cleaning personnel, people making deliveries and installations, and others may be exposed. You can reduce your risk of picking up and transporting bed bugs to your vehicle, home or office by following the suggestions below.

What do bed bugs look like?



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Bed bugs are flat, oval, reddish-brown, wingless insects about 1/4 of an inch long. An adult bed bug looks somewhat like a wood tick.

After the bed bug has taken a blood meal, its color will change from brown to purplish-red and the body of the bed bug becomes larger and more cigar-shaped. Young bed bugs (or nymphs) are much smaller - about 1/16 inch long when they first hatch. Nymphs are nearly colorless, and become bright red after feeding.

In addition to finding bed bugs in an infested location, you may also find the empty shells (or skins) that bed bugs cast off, as they grow from one stage to the next. After a blood meal, bed bugs deposit black spots of feces, composed of digested blood, in areas near the feeding site or where the bed bugs hide.

Signs of a bed bug infestation

- Live or dead bed bugs
- Cast off, amber colored, empty shells
- Nearly colorless bed bug eggs
- Brown or black specks of excrement (feces)
- Dried blood spots near a feeding area
- With a heavy infestation, there may be a sweet odor.

What can I do to keep from bringing bed bugs home with me?

- Take as little equipment as possible into a building where you will be working.
- If you know a place is infested or suspect an infestation, seal your equipment in a large, sealable plastic bag (e.g., Ziploc) or plastic bin when not in use.
- Leave personal items in sealed bags or containers in your vehicle.
- Do not sit on beds or upholstered furniture. If you must sit, consider bringing a folding chair to sit on.
- Do not place personal items on beds, carpets or upholstered furniture.
- Bring a change of shoes/boots and clothes for work. Change out of field clothes at work, and place them in a sealed bag for cleaning.
- Or, use disposable shoe covers to minimize the chance of picking up and transporting bed bugs on your shoes. Discard the shoe covers before entering your vehicle.
- Learn how to recognize bed bugs. If you think you have found them, collect one or two for identification. Notify the homeowner or building manager immediately.
- Check yourself and your clothing when you leave a suspected or known infestation site.

What to tell a home or business owner whose building is infested:

- First, confirm that you have bed bugs. Trap suspect insects on a piece of tape and have the bugs identified by a pest management professional or an entomologist.
- If bed bugs are confirmed, don't try to treat the problem yourself. You might make the problem worse, resulting in repeated treatments and more expense.
- Seek a professional pest management company that is licensed by the State of Minnesota.
- Get more than one estimate, and question the company about their experience with bed bugs. Ask them what methods they use to control bed bug infestations.
- Get your money's worth by following your pest management professional's directions about how to prepare for their visit, and how to clean or dispose of infested items, after their visit.
- Expect a series of treatments before bed bugs are completely removed.

What should I do when I get home?

If you think you may have bed bugs on your clothing, undress while standing on a white sheet or surface, so you can see bed bugs if they fall to the floor. You can put your clothing in the dryer immediately, or wash them first.

Wash and dry clothes at the hottest setting the fabric can withstand. It takes 120 degrees Fahrenheit to kill bed bugs. Before taking clothes to the dry cleaner, put them in the dryer for 20 to 30 minutes on the highest setting. Let the dry cleaner know they might be infested.

Keep shoes or other items that cannot be easily cleaned in a plastic bag or box in the trunk of your vehicle, if possible.

What should I do if I am bitten?

Bed bugs are not known to carry disease but the bites can be annoying. The bites are usually painless. You may not notice that you are being bitten. It may take only minutes (particularly if you have been bitten many times) or may take days for you to notice small, flat, or raised bumps on your skin. Bed bug bites may occur in rows on the skin.

Some people do not react at all, and never know they have been bitten. In others, bed bug bites may cause redness, swelling, and itching. Most people can use topical ointments to relieve itching, if it occurs. If you scratch bed bug bites, the bites may become infected and require antibiotic treatment.

A small number of people have a serious allergic reaction to bed bug bites. If this happens to you, seek medical care.

For more information:

University of Minnesota Extension
www.bedbugs.umn.edu

Ramsey County, Minnesota
http://www.co.ramsey.mn.us/ph/id/bed_bugs.htm

Illinois Department of Public Health:
<http://www.idph.state.il.us/envhealth/pcbbedbugs.htm>

State of Michigan Emerging Disease Issues
<http://www.michigan.gov/emergingdiseases/0,1607,7-186--147759--,00.html>

Virginia Department of Agriculture
<http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/pesticides/bedbugs>

Material in this fact sheet was adapted, with the permission of the authors, from:

Help! I Stayed at a place that had bed bugs! What can I do to prevent bringing them home? Stephen A. Kells and Jeff Hahn, University of Minnesota Department of Entomology

If You Enter Places That Might Have Bed Bugs
 Illinois Department of Public Health