

Bed Bugs: What Schools Need to Know

Recently, Michigan and other states have seen an increased number of bed bug infestations plaguing residents. As bed bugs infest more and more homes, they may find their way into schools. When this happens, the school needs to take proactive action to prevent infestation and stop them from spreading in the school setting.

What are bed bugs?

Bed bugs are small, brownish, flattened insects that feed on the blood of people while they sleep. Although the bite does not hurt at the time, it may develop into an itchy welt similar to a mosquito bite. Bed bugs do not transmit disease, but they can cause significant itchiness, anxiety, and sleeplessness. Bed bug infestations are also very difficult and expensive to control.

Usually, bed bugs will hide during the day and only come out to feed during the night. Unlike head lice, they do not live on a person. However, they can hitchhike from one place to another in backpacks, clothing, luggage, books, and other items.



Could my classroom be infested?

Actual bed bug infestations in schools are uncommon. More commonly, a few bed bugs will hitchhike to school from an infested home by hiding in a student's clothing or backpack. Bed bugs that hitch a ride into the school in one student's backpack could be carried home by another student, making the school a potential hub for bed bug spread. This is not a minor concern – bed bugs are very expensive and difficult to eradicate.

If a school plans to use pesticides to control pests indoors, then they are required under Michigan law to have an **integrated pest management (IPM)** plan in place. If a bed bug infestation is suspected or a number of students are getting bitten during class, the school should contact a **licensed pest management professional** for assistance.

What if I find a bed bug on a student?

If a bed bug is found on a student, it may indicate that the student has bed bugs at home. However, bed bugs can crawl onto or off of a person (or their belongings) at any time, so it is also possible that the bed bug was brought to school by someone else. If a suspected bed bug is found on a student or a student's belongings, the following procedures should be followed:

- The student should be discreetly removed from the classroom so that the school nurse or a qualified individual can examine the student's clothing and other belongings. Any bugs found should be removed and collected for identification. Try to keep the specimens as intact as possible.
- If a confirmed bed bug was found on a student, then the school principal or nurse should contact the student's parents or guardian to inform them of the bed bug presence on their child. Educational materials, such as those available at <http://www.michigan.gov/diseases>, should also be provided to the family.
- The school principal or nurse or center program director should consider notifying the affected class or classes. A sample notification letter is provided at the end of this document.
- Students should not be excluded from school due to bed bugs, and schools should not be closed due to bed bug presence. Scientific evidence does not show that bed bugs spread disease, and as discussed previously, infestation of a school building is unlikely.
- Ongoing pest management that includes the use of pesticides indoors should be overseen by the school principal or designee and must conform to the school's integrated pest management plan, as required by Michigan law (MCL 324.8316).



What can I do to eliminate bed bugs from my classroom?

- DO NOT allow untrained staff to apply pesticides on school property. By law, only IPM trained applicators can apply pesticides (even ready-to-use products like sprays) in schools, and in compliance with the school's IPM plan.
- Backpacks, lunchboxes, and other items that travel back and forth to school can also be inspected daily and sealed in plastic containers to prevent bed bugs from getting into them at home.
- Hard surfaces can be cleaned with standard cleaning products.
- If bed bugs have been found repeatedly in a particular classroom, have the room inspected by a pest management professional or other trained staff.

What if one of my students has an infestation at home?

When a student is dealing with an infestation at home, it is important to be sensitive to their problem. Although bed bugs have nothing to do with cleanliness or socioeconomic status, there is still a stigma that can come with having bed bugs. As a result, parents may be hesitant to admit to having bed bugs, and students may not want others to know they have an infestation at home. Students living in an infested home may also feel anxious or tired during the school day.

Schools should work with the parents of any student living in an infested home to develop strategies for preventing the further spread of bed bugs.

- Determine if the infested home is being treated. Home remedies and do-it-yourself treatments are usually insufficient and could cause negative health effects or produce potential hazards in the home.
- If a parent lacks the financial resources to hire a pest management professional, they can reference the online resources at: <http://www.michigan.gov/diseases>.
- In an infested home, parents should store their child's freshly laundered clothing in sealed plastic bags until they are put on in the morning. This prevents bed bugs from hiding in the clothing and being carried to school.
- Backpacks, lunchboxes, and other items that travel back and forth to school can also be inspected daily and stored in sealed plastic containers at home to prevent bed bugs from getting into them.
- At school, the student could be provided with plastic bags or bins in which to store their belongings in order to prevent any bed bugs from spreading to other students' belongings.
- If bed bugs are finding their way into the school, consider notifying the affected classes. A sample notification letter is provided at the end of this document.
- Continue to use these measures until successful treatment of the home has been verified.

Additional Resources

- Michigan Bed Bug Resources
<http://www.michigan.gov/diseases>
- Central Ohio Bed Bug Task Force
<http://centralohiobedbugs.org/>
- Model IPM Plan for Michigan Schools
http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mda_A_Model_Integrated_Pest_Management_Policy_for_Michigan_Schools4_130114_7.pdf



Bed bug images provided by U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Bed bug bite image provided by University of Sydney Department of Medical Entomology

Bed bugs in baseboard image provided by Ohio State University Extension Entomology



**** SAMPLE ****

Bed Bugs Found in a Classroom Parent Notification Letter

(Use appropriate school letterhead)

Dear Parent or Guardian:

We recently found a bed bug in your child's classroom. Bed bugs are a nuisance, but their bites are not known to spread disease. Bed bugs are usually active at night and feed on human blood. The bite does not hurt at first, but it may become swollen and itch, much like a mosquito bite. Watch for clusters of bites, usually in a line, on exposed areas of the body. If you have medical concerns for you or your child, please contact your doctor.

The source of bed bugs often cannot be determined, as bed bugs may be found in many places including hotels, planes, and movie theaters. Even though it is unlikely for bed bugs to infest a school, *(fill in your school district here)* will conduct an inspection and, if needed, will implement an intergrated pest management plan in the area where the bed bug was found. *(Fill in your school district here)* will continue to work to identify bed bugs, provide thorough inspections of schools, and have licensed pest control specialists assist with pest management.

Contact your physician or school nurse for proper care and treatment of bed bug bites.

If you have any questions regarding bed bugs in your school, please contact Principal *(add principal's name and contact info here)*. If you have any questions regarding bed bugs found in your home, contact your local health department or visit <http://www.michigan.gov/diseases>.

Sincerely,

School Nurse
(If one is available)

Principal