Report to the Boards of Health
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Mid-Michigan District Health Department, Wednesday, May 27, 2026
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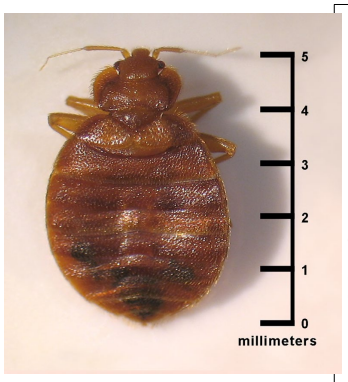
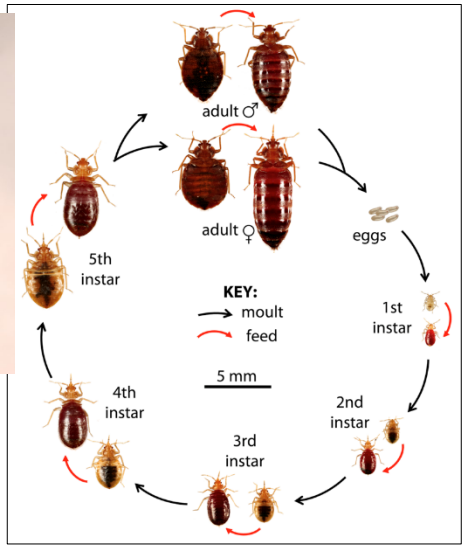
District Health Department 10, Friday, May 29, 2026

Bed Bugs





Adult bed bugs are small, flat, reddish-brown insects about the size of an apple seed. They can survive more than a year and can live through very cold temperatures. They cannot fly. They spend most of their time hiding, especially during the daytime or in bright light. They hide in mattresses, bed frames, furniture, and cracks in walls. They come out mostly at night to feed on human blood. They are attracted by warmth and carbon dioxide produced as we breathe. Bed bugs are not a sign of a dirty home, and anyone can get them. They can travel in luggage, used furniture, clothing, and even electronics.

Life Cycle

A female bed bug can lay hundreds of eggs in her lifetime. Eggs hatch in about a week. Young bed bugs (called nymphs) need to feed on blood before they can grow. In warm conditions, bed bugs go from egg to adult in about five weeks. This is why infestations grow quickly if not treated.

How They Spread

Bed bugs move from place to place by hitching rides on people's belongings, not by crawling long distances on their own. In apartment buildings, they can crawl through opening in walls, electrical outlets, and cracks between units. This means treating only one apartment rarely solves the problem.

History

Fossilized bed bugs have been found dating back further than 3,500 years. They used to be very common in the United States and around the world. In the mid-1900s, widespread use of DDT nearly eradicated bed bugs in the U.S. Due to the human and environmental health consequences of DDT, its use was banned in 1972. Bed bugs have been making a comeback since 1990s.

Why Bed Bugs Have Been Coming Back

There are many reasons bed bugs have been making a return around the world and in the U.S. There has been less awareness of bed bugs and how to prevent infestation because they have been less common for so long. There is more travel and more unique places to stay when we are away from home. When bed bugs do occur, the wrong pesticides may be used. Most bed bugs in the U.S., including those found in Michigan, are now resistant to common pesticides. Sprays that used to work no longer do. Even newer chemicals are failing. Pest control experts now rely on heat treatments and a mix of methods rather than sprays alone. For more information on treatment methods that can be safely used by nonprofessionals, see our booklet "Getting the Bed Bugs Out".

How Bed Bugs Affect People's Health

Even though bed bugs have not been proven to spread diseases like viruses or bacteria, they are considered a pest of significant public health importance. Bites usually show up as small, itchy, red bumps like a mosquito bite and are often in a line or cluster on exposed skin. Some people may not react at all, while others may have more

serious allergic reactions or asthma attacks. Scratching bites can lead to skin infections, including serious ones like cellulitis or impetigo.

Bed bugs infestations can cause serious stress and mental health problems. People with bed bugs often feel embarrassed and ashamed, even though bed bugs have nothing to do with cleanliness. This shame causes people to hide the problem, which makes it worse. People may feel isolated from friends and family. They can cause anxiety and loss of sleep. In areas where bed bugs are less common there can be community panic and fear, compounding all of these issues.

Bed bug infestations can be a major financial burden. It is often much more costly and complicated to get rid of bed bugs than other pests. There are typically few resources to help families and building owners cover costs. People may try to get rid of them on their own, using harmful chemicals not meant for bed bugs, adding health risks.

Bed Bug Control in Michigan

One of the most complicated parts of the bed bug problem in Michigan is that no single law mentions bed bugs or defines who handles them. Laws and rules against vermin or other insects also apply to protecting the public against bed bugs.

Michigan Housing Law (MCL 125.474) states "the owner of every dwelling shall be responsible for keeping the entire building free from vermin", which includes bed bugs. This law covers most places used for living or sleeping, including residences, rental housing, rooming houses, and hotels and motels.

Landlords and Tenants

The owner and landlord is responsible for keeping the building free from bed bugs, while tenants are responsible for keeping their own space clean and cooperating with inspections and treatments. If a landlord refuses to act a tenants could withhold rent (through rent escrow), break their lease, or sue for damages. If a tenant refuses to cooperate, this could be grounds to end the lease, because an untreated unit puts neighbors at risk. Treatment costs are usually the landlord's responsibility, but tenants may share costs if they caused the infestation, such as bringing in infested used furniture.

Housing Law and Local Code Enforcement

The Michigan Housing Law gives local officials (usually county, city, or township code enforcement [or ordinance] officers) the authority to inspect premises, require compliance, and take action against an owner or occupant where conditions are considered a "public nuisance" or detrimental to the health of the occupants. Local government can also adopt and enforce their own codes that set more specific or higher standards.

Local Health Departments

It might seem that the local health departments have some of the strongest legal tools available, but their main role is to provide information and education about bed bugs. Under Michigan's Public Health Code, MCL 333.2455 local health departments are given the authority to order a property owner to fix a "nuisance, unsanitary condition, or cause of illness" which some could argue include a bed bug infestation. Under MCL 333.2451, emergency orders could be applied when there is an immediate danger to health. Bed bugs are rarely a clear danger to health, and most health departments only use these legal tools as a last resort. And even when these tools are utilized, enforcement requires the support of the county prosecuting attorney, judges, and law enforcement.

Licensed Facilities (Nursing Homes, Foster Care, etc.)

Nursing homes, adult foster care homes, childcare centers, and other licensed facilities are inspected and regulated by Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) or their delegate. Bed bug infestations in these settings must be addressed as a condition of keeping their license.

MDARD (Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development)
MDARD is the only state agency that regulates pest control companies and the chemicals they use. Pest control workers who treat bed bugs must be licensed by MDARD under Category 7A (General Pest Management). If a pest control company uses chemicals improperly, MDARD should investigate.

Pesticides in Schools, Daycares, and Public Buildings
In Michigan, there are extra rules about using pesticides in public places and places where children spend time. Before anyone can spray or apply pesticide in a school, daycare, or other public building, the building must have a written pest management plan in place, and the person doing the treatment must have completed a special training program approved by Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD). This applies to pest control companies as well as school or daycare staff. These rules come from Michigan's Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (MCL 324.8314 and MCL 324.8316) and MDARD Regulation 637. Schools and daycares must also notify parents at least 48 hours before any pesticide is applied and they must do this every year in writing, even if no treatment has happened yet.

Recommendations:

1. Bed bugs are a nuisance and can cause a lot of stress and expense. Prevention is very important in areas that don't yet have infestations. Learn how to prevent bringing them into your home and how to detect infestation early.
2. It is important to increase people's awareness about this growing issue. There should be continuing public education about bed bugs. These campaigns should target children in schools, people in workplaces, and families at home and travel.
3. If you suspect you have bed bugs, don't panic but act quickly. Make sure they truly are bed bugs then turn to professional resources and help.

Resources:

- MDHHS Emerging Disease Issues, Bed Bugs https://www.michigan.gov/emergingdiseases/home/bed-bugs
- Purdue University Information on Bed bugs https://extension.entm.purdue.edu/bedbugs/index.php
- Bed bug prevention and control in the home (printable and multilingual) https://extension.umn.edu/bed-bugs/bed-bug-prevention-and-control-home
- https://bedbugsexposed.pestworld.org/
- https://www.pestworldforkids.org/
- MSU Pest Identification https://www.canr.msu.edu/pestid/
- www.mi.gov/MDARDPABL to find licensed pesticide application business in Michigan
- EPA: Bed Bugs: Get Them Out and Keep Them Out https://19january2021snapshot.epa.gov/bedbugs_.html
- EPA Bed Bugs in Schools Guidance for Administrators, Teachers and Staff
- National Pest Management Association Bed Bug Best Management Practices English and Spanish https://www.npmapestworld.org/content-pages/technical-resources/guidelines/guidelines-bed-bug-best-management-practices/

Sources

- Michigan Manual for the Prevention and Control of Bed Bugs
- The History of Bed Bugs https://www.bedbugs.org/the-history-of-bed-bugs/
- Alalawi AH (2014) Bed Bugs Epidemic in the United States. Entomol Ornithol Herpetol 4: 143. doi:10.4172/2161-0983.1000143
- Joint Statement on Bed Bug Control in the United States from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).