

# LHO GUIDE: BEDBUGS



Bedbugs are very small, rust-colored insects that take blood meals from human and animal hosts (mostly humans). They usually feed at night and therefore live where humans sleep, hiding in wall cracks and crevices in mattresses and nearby furniture. At night they will climb bed legs and sheets to find a meal then retreat to hiding places during the day. Usual signs of infestation include rusty blood stains, pinpoint dark droppings, or insects found on sheets or in mattress crevices.

Bedbugs are not known to transmit disease to humans and their bites usually cause no serious complications. A bedbug infestation would be considered a public health nuisance in most cases. However, individual response to bites can vary: some individuals are sensitive to bites; for others concern about infestation can affect sleep.

**LHOs can assist residents and owners** and municipal leaders by providing public health education about bedbug biology, signs of an infestation, clarification of healthy living conditions, bedbug statutes and responsibilities, and by providing mediation and communication assistance to advance resolution steps and guide enforcement where needed.

## When you receive a complaint



### **Hear complaint**, ask informational questions as indicated

Information to obtain could include:

**What signs** of infestation are present ?

**How long** has issue been present ?

**Has the landlord/owner** been notified, when/how ?

**What steps** have already been taken by renter and by landlord/owner ?

(ex: is an inspection already planned or completed? Any treatments/mitigation steps taken?)

**How many apartments/dwelling units** are in the building? Have the other units been treated ?

**Are there** especially vulnerable individuals living in the home (ex: children, elders) ?

**What is the complainant looking for** from LHO or town; what is next step requested ?



### **Provide public health education** as needed:

Relevant points might include:

- **Bedbugs are *not* known to transmit disease to humans;** they are considered a public nuisance in most cases.
- **Individual responses to bedbug bites vary.** Although most bites cause no serious complications, bites can be very itchy for some. Scratching can cause infection and concern about an infestation can affect sleep. Complainant should follow up with primary care provider if needed.
- **Bedbugs can be carried unknowingly into any home** or building in luggage, backpacks, furniture, clothing, esp. following overnight travel. They can travel easily between units in multi-unit buildings.
- **How to determine if bedbugs are present:** ex: Check mattress creases and bedside tables for rust-colored stains, dark spots; place cups under bed legs ("interceptors") to thwart climbing bedbugs.
- **Maine has a detailed statute related to bedbug infestation** which includes tenant and landlord responsibilities and a stepwise approach to infestation resolution, including required timeline for response. Tenant/landlord complainants should review it here: [\(Title 14 §6021-A. Treatment of bedbug infestation\).](#)
- **If renter, it is important to notify landlord/owner in writing** if you suspect infestation. Include information about signs of infestation; include photos if possible.
- **Professional pest management and repeat treatments are usually needed.** Bedbugs can travel easily between units; treatment of all units in a multi-unit building is necessary for effective remediation.
- **How to find** a licensed pest management company if applicable.
- **Note for any renter**, continued payment of rent is mentioned in statute's tenant responsibilities; tenant should consult legal counsel if any questions.



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## Inspection / complaint verification



### Inspection notes to resident / owner:

- Determine whether a qualified pest management company visit/ inspection of the location is already planned, either hired by the landlord/owner or resident/renter.
- Occupant should move furniture and clear clutter as needed to prepare for inspection & treatment of affected areas. They can refer to a online guide such as EPA's guide page here: <https://www.epa.gov/bedbugs/preparing-treatment-against-bed-bugs>.
- If you will be doing the initial inspection, let the renter or owner know what to expect during an inspection visit in general terms.
- Let them know that if you discover or suspect that an infestation is severe, you will defer to a qualified professional pest management company to complete an inspection.
- Let them know you will be taking photos to document the problem.
- Let them know *per routine* you might visit with a municipal colleague, such as the code enforcement officer and/or police officer (if indicated).
- **Obtain consent to enter premises and inspect; note consent in your record.**



### Safety during inspection - considerations

- If possible, do not respond alone. Inspect as a team with a municipal colleague - if possible, a building code expert (ex: CEO). Bring law enforcement if you have any concerns.
- Risk for spread is highest to those staying overnight in an infested area, but is not zero for inspection visitors.
- For minor problems, take appropriate precautions to protect yourself. Avoid sitting on sleeping areas such as couches and beds. Wear simple clothes and shoes you can throw in a hot dryer when home; consider wearing gown & gloves. Bring plastic bags or sheeting and set your own belongings down on those.
- If you discover or suspect that an infestation is severe, defer to a qualified professional pest management company to complete an inspection.
- Bring municipal identification;
- Bring a camera; flashlight; magnifier
- Keep notes (with a checklist if possible) as you inspect.
- **A helpful guide for your inspection: [How to identify a bedbug infestation \(UVa\)](#)**

## Additional Resources

### Public health resources

*Consult your District Liaison for assistance*

Selection of bedbug resources for LHO reference and education for the public can be found on the Maine CDC's online [LHO Resources page](#) and include:

[Got Pests? pages of Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry \(DACF\)](#)

[About Bed Bugs \(CDC\)](#)

[A Guide for Landlords: Why Integrated Pest Management \(IPM\) makes good business sense](#)

[How to identify a bedbug infestation \(UVa\)](#)

### Statutes that might apply

*Consult your municipal attorney for assistance*

[Title 14 Section 6021](#) Implied Warranty and Covenant of Habitability

[Title 14 Section 6021-A](#) Treatment of Bedbug Infestation

[Title 22 Section 1561](#) Removal of a Private Nuisance

[Title 22 Section 461](#) Notice to owner to clean premises; expenses on refusal

[Title 22 Section 252](#) Penalties

[Title 22 Section 451-A Powers and Duties](#). Local health officer duties

[Consumer Rights When You Rent an Apartment \(Maine Attorney General's Office\)](#)

Relevant local codes or ordinances

*See Complaint Response – Sample Process (Overview) for more*

*When responding to a potential public health threat, if you and your municipal colleagues need additional technical support you can reach out to your Maine CDC Public Health District Liaison (find your DL [here](#)).*

