

# Bedbugs

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## 1 A resurgence in bedbugs is a result of increased travel and insecticide resistance

Many bedbug populations are resistant to pyrethroid, a chemical contained in most currently used insecticides.<sup>1</sup> Bedbugs multiply exponentially, with thousands of bugs per infestation after 2–3 months.<sup>2</sup>

## 2 Bites can be difficult to identify

Bedbugs feed at night, primarily on areas not covered by clothing. Itchy, erythematous maculopapular lesions, 2–5 mm in diameter, usually appear within 24–48 hours.<sup>1,2</sup> Less common presentations are wheals, linear lesions, bullae and vesicles.<sup>1,2</sup> Bedbugs live in crevices of furniture and mattresses and are difficult to spot (Appendix 1, available at [www.cmaj.ca/lookup/doi/10.1503/cmaj.221454/tab-related-content](http://www.cmaj.ca/lookup/doi/10.1503/cmaj.221454/tab-related-content)).<sup>2</sup> Many people do not know their home is infested. Some people, particularly older adults, may not develop any skin reaction to bites.<sup>1</sup>

## 3 Symptom management is important until the infestation is eradicated<sup>1,2</sup>

Antihistamines and topical steroids may help pruritus. Psychological effects, including anxiety, insomnia, social isolation and stigma, are common.<sup>1–3</sup> Lesions resolve within 1–2 weeks after eradication.<sup>1,2</sup>

## 4 Eradication requires a combination of chemical and mechanical methods<sup>1–3</sup>

Patients should be given information on physical control of bedbugs, including vacuuming, steaming, freezing, washing and drying of clothing and bedding, as well as bagging belongings.<sup>4</sup> Despite resistance, insecticides can reduce bedbug biomass.<sup>2</sup> Desiccant dusts dehydrate bugs and can be part of a bedbug control strategy.<sup>1,2,4</sup> Older adults and people with disabilities often require practical support for successful eradication.<sup>3</sup>

## 5 Simple precautions and use of personal protective equipment can reduce the risk of picking up bedbugs<sup>5</sup>

Bedbugs do not fly or jump and have to hitch a ride to travel. Tips for visiting infested dwellings include wearing disposable shoe covers and clothing that can be put in a hot dryer, carrying minimal belongings, hanging bags and coats up high or in sealable plastic containers or bags, and bringing a stool or sitting only on hard chairs without cushions.<sup>5</sup>

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