



Tips to Avoid Getting and Spreading Bed Bugs

Bed bugs are back and continue to spread across the United States. They can be found anywhere, from big cities to small towns, offices, movie theaters, restaurants, hospitals, private homes, apartments and even stores. By taking precautions in your daily life, you can avoid getting and spreading bed bugs.

What follows below are instructions for cleaning and “debugging” the things you need to wear or bring with you, when dealing with an infestation at home. You will also learn how to protect your belongings from bed bugs at work or in spaces that are at risk for bed bug introductions (basically any public space) or infestations (places where people sleep such as hotels, nursing homes, hospitals, homes). You can go to from home to work, school, or anywhere and back again without transporting bed bugs.

What You Will Need

- Containers for coats, shoes, bags, backpacks, laptop such as:
 - Large zippered plastic storage bags (such as Ziploc XXL)
 - Airtight plastic tote
 - Plastic tote and duct tape to seal it shut
 - Plastic tote with the inside rim lined with carpet tape (if you are careful not to brush items against the tape, it will remain sticky for a long time, blocking any bed bugs attempting to escape)
- A source of heat such as:
 - A clothing dryer (at home or at a Laundromat) - BEST
 - An iron and a towel (hot iron items under a towel to kill bed bugs and eggs)
 - A hair dryer in good condition
 - A meat thermometer to verify that heat reaches at least 125°F

Create a Clean Zone

Whether dealing with a bed bug infestation or trying to avoid one, you can create a “clean zone” that is bed bug-free. This area will be a place to transition from home to work or school that will intercept hitchhiking bugs. Ideally, the clean zone is located outside the home, but can be right by the front door, in the garage, bathroom, kitchen, or even a clean white sheet in the middle of a room. Keep the clean zone as far as possible from sleeping areas.

The clean zone preferably should have three containers. One for items that move from home to work or school, one for bed bug free clothing, and the other to store worn clothes and the white sheet after you have entered the home.

The Process: Leave Home without Bed Bugs

If you are dealing with bed bugs at home, avoid bringing these pests to work or school by leaving your home from the clean zone.

- Prepare clothes and belongings for the day by making them bed bug-free (see below) and isolating them until it’s nearly time to leave.

The Process

Don’t take bed bugs with you:

1. Clean and debug your things
2. Isolate those clean things from bed bugs
3. Put on or grab clean things you need for the day and get on your way

Don’t bring bed bugs home with you:

1. Enter your home through a “clean zone”
2. Isolate anything that could have bed bugs and prepare to treat
3. Treat those things



This is a clean zone, near a front door, with plastic containers for storage and a white sheet to catch stray bed bugs that may fall off clothing.

- Make dressing the last thing you do before leaving.
- When you have finished your morning routine, are dressed and ready for work or school, do not sit down on your bed or other furniture.
- Gather your daily things stowed in the clean zone container and head off to work or school.

The Process: Arrive Home and Prevent Introduction

If you work in a high-risk setting where exposure to bed bugs can happen, take these precautions to avoid bringing them home.

- Before entering the home, inspect your clothing and shoes for adult bed bugs: only females can start an infestation and are highly visible. Eggs are unlikely to be picked up in one place and transported to another. Tip: Bed bugs show up better against light colored clothing.
- Step into the clean zone, place all items from the day, including coats, shoes, bags and clothes (if necessary) into a sealed plastic bag or container.
- Place clothes and the white sheet, if applicable, in a container until they can be heat treated.
- Put on a set of bed bug free clothing.
- Heat treat clothing and white sheet.
- If other items were exposed during the day, consider treating them. See [“How to Get Bed Bugs Out of Your Belongings”](#) for instructions.



An adult bed bug is large and easily visible next to a dime.

Use Dryer Heat to Kill Bed Bugs

Clothing, coats, sturdy shoes, slippers, backpacks, computer bags, and purses can be cleared of bed bugs by placing items into a dryer and heating to 125°F. **Washing is not needed and not enough to kill bed bugs.**

Test the dryer for the right level of heat:

- Place 2 or 3 dry towels into the dryer.
- Set the dryer on high for 20 minutes.
- After the 20 minutes are up, open the hot dryer quickly, place a meat thermometer in the center of the towels and close the door.
- After one minute, check the thermometer. Temperatures over 125°F will kill bed bugs.
- If the temperature is below 125°F, increase the heat level or the length of time in the dryer [two hours at 115° F will kill bed bugs].
- If 115°F is not possible, use a different dryer or a commercial Laundromat. Occasionally test the dryer to ensure it is still reaching the appropriate temperature.



Shoes and items that cannot be tumbled can be placed in a mesh bag on the door of a front-loading dryer.

If the target temperature is reached, place items into the dryer using the same heat and time settings. This will kill and remove bed bugs from your belongings.

Do not over stuff the dryer and ensure that items are tumbling! All items must reach the target temperature to achieve control.

Isolate to Stop the Spread

Items that cannot be laundered can still be “debugged” using a slower process.

- Place individual books or small piles of paper/files, electronics, toys, etc. into air-tight, heavy-duty zipper bags or containers
- Store bagged items in a warm area. Warmth makes bed bugs more active and can kill them by dehydration
- If bed bugs are present, they can often be seen in the corners of bags
- If you see bed bug activity, you can crush bugs or eggs that are found. Leave items encased in zipper bags for at least three months.
- For more details about isolation techniques see [“How to Get Bed Bugs Out of Your Belongings”](#).

Stay Bed Bug Free During the Day - Keep it Simple

- If working in areas that might have bed bugs (homes, hotels, offices, etc.), only bring what you need and isolate items in zippered storage bags between visits.
- Bed bugs cannot fly or jump, but can move quickly and survive for long periods of time without feeding. Assume that bed bugs can be anywhere and act accordingly.
- Avoid sitting on plush furniture in public places
- Avoid placing personal items on the floor or on furniture



Seal items that must travel from place to place in an airtight container.

Special Considerations

Babies, toddlers and school-age children

All children who live in a household that is dealing with bed bugs should be free of bed bugs before leaving the home. Infants and toddlers who attend child care or other programs are at risk of transporting bed bugs both to and from the child care center. Some considerations include:

- Diaper bags can be emptied and placed into a hot dryer to kill bed bugs daily or stored in an airtight container while in the home.
- In the home, diapers and other supplies that will leave the home should be stored in sealed containers.
- Children should be dressed in bed bug-free clothes immediately before leaving the home.
- Try to avoid bringing strollers and car seats into child care centers or your home. If it cannot be avoided, steam or heat-treat them to ensure they are bed bug free. Use a hand-held steamer or hair dryer. See "[How to Get Bed Bugs Out of Your Belongings](#)" for instructions on heat and steam for baby gear and more.

Keep bed bugs out of schools

Bed bugs are showing up in schools, especially K-5, where children are vulnerable to the stigma of having bed bugs. Measures should be taken to avoid transport of bed bugs into the classroom.

- Backpacks, coats and shoes are very likely routes of bed bug movement. These should be heated in the dryer and stored in a clean bag or container.
- School children should be dressed in the clean zone just before leaving home.
- Schoolbooks and papers can transfer bed bugs. These items should be stored away from infested areas, and kept in zippered bags when not in use.
- Have children read only at the kitchen table to reduce the likelihood of introducing a bed bug into a bedroom.
- Books or papers exposed to bed bugs should be thoroughly inspected before sending to school.
- If buying new clothing, shoes or bags, keep these items isolated in sealed containers until needed to prevent contact with bed bugs.



In school, backpacks should be separated by space or placed in clear plastic bags if bed bug introductions are common in the classroom.