

Dealing with Bed Bugs 101

Tips for Peace Library System Member Libraries
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Introduction

With both local borrowing and interlibrary loaning - as well as in-person visits from the public - library materials and library furniture may come into contact with a variety of insect pests. Bed bugs have become a public focus in the last 5-10 years, but while a nuisance, they are not dangerous, do not carry diseases, and are less likely to show up in libraries than in homes, hotels, or hospitals.

Bed bugs are not a library's biggest worry when it comes to insect damage. Insects which most commonly cause damage in libraries and archives throughout the world are cockroaches, silverfish, book-lice, beetles and termites. Because of the worry of stigma attached to the presence or perception of insects in the library, there may be a tendency to either over react to or ignore evidence. This tip sheet, while not exhaustive, is intended to provide a calm and reasoned approach to dealing with pests, particularly bed bugs.

Policy and Procedure

The library should develop its own policy and procedure for prevention and action regarding insect pests. Resource: *Bed Bug Guide for Public Libraries*, by Sarah Kittrell, 2016. It is available for purchase in PDF format from <http://publiclibrariesonline.org/the-store/> and contains detailed information on bed bugs, how other libraries have dealt with them, and recommended policies and procedures.

The Library Facility

1. Soft library furniture is a main challenge, as bed bugs will try to hide themselves in a tight, warm, dark space, close to a food source (people). Keep the furniture well-vacuumed, including the seams and crevices. Inspect furniture, shelves, and electronics regularly. Wipe things down with rubbing alcohol. (Don't spray rubbing alcohol directly onto electronics, spray onto a cloth and wipe down.)
2. Book drops are a gateway into the library. Put sticky bug traps in the book drop to catch anything before it enters the facility. Wipe the book drop with rubbing alcohol.
3. Climate in the library – a damp, warm environment is inviting to bed bugs. Keep the library well ventilated.
4. Advise library staff - if they are worried about taking bed bugs home with them – to put their clothes in the dryer on high heat for an hour, which will kill bed bugs at any stage of their life cycle from egg to adult. (Do NOT put clothes in the washing machine first.)

Library Materials

1. Train library staff to examine each item that comes in from another library through ILL or that is returned by a patron. See this powerpoint for clear images of what bed bugs look like at each stage of their life cycle. Display a poster in the library's ILL and circulation space of the images. http://www.ala.org/pla/sites/ala.org.pla/files/content/onlinelearning/webinars/archive/PLA_Kittrell_Dont-let-the-bed-bugs-bite_Final.pdf

2. Do NOT satisfy a patron's hold with an item that library staff feel uncertain about. You do not have to be an expert, and you may choose to err on the side of caution.
3. Quarantine the item in a sealed Ziploc bag. If the library owns the item, make a decision about the type of insect and consider discarding the item. Do not put it in a book sale or on the 'swap' shelf.
4. If it is an ILL item, take photos of the suspected evidence and send a courteous email to the owning library. Ask if they would like the item returned to them in the Ziploc bag or if they would prefer you to destroy the item. Get that instruction in an email so there is no misunderstanding later.
5. Because library items can pass through many patrons before returning home to the owning library, and because we cannot be certain that other libraries' staff are carefully inspecting ILL items, it is very difficult to accurately assign responsibility for insects to a specific patron. In most cases, it is only possible to deal with the item. Libraries are not to contact other libraries' patrons (except in the case of a wandering patron who transacted in-person at your library).
6. Local patrons: It is VERY IMPORTANT that your library staff are CONSISTENTLY looking through all items before checking them out to your patrons. If the library can confidently assert that the item had no insect damage at the time of check out, then it may be safe to assume that the insects were picked up while the item was with your patron. In the case of a chronic issue, contact the patron, advise them of your findings, and suspend borrowing privileges if necessary until the matter is dealt with.

Professional Assistance

If you suspect an infestation in your library, contact a professional to confirm and treat the problem.

1. Certified detection dogs. The cost for the service is based on the type of property and the square footage to be inspected. To find a company, do an internet search for "bed bug detection dogs" and your location or a larger city near you.
2. Pest control companies, such as Orkin. To find a company, go to <https://www.yellowpages.ca/locations/Alberta> and at the top of the screen search for "Pest Control Service" in your community. Options include chemical treatments (insecticides) and heat treatments (heating the materials and the space over 50 degrees Celsius).
3. If you are uncertain whether insect evidence (squished bugs/spots) in a library book is bed bugs or not, take a clear photo and consider asking a local pest control company. Inquire if they charge a fee or if they are willing to answer the occasional question as a complimentary service.

Further Reading

Environmental Public Health. "How Do I Treat a Bed Bug Infestation?" Alberta Health Services, 15 March 2018, <https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Alberta/Pages/How-do-i-treat-a-bed-bug-infestation.aspx>

Wilson, Kristian. "Can You Get Bed Bugs From A Library Book? Technically Yes, But Entomologists Say It's More Complicated Than That." Bustle, 19 February 2018, <https://www.bustle.com/p/can-you-get-bed-bugs-from-a-library-book-technically-yes-but-entomologists-say-its-more-complicated-than-that-8236894>