

A CAUTIONARY BED BUG TALE

By Eliza Moore

I reached down to scratch my leg, which was a bit itchy. It didn't help, so I scratched again—itch, scratch, itch, scratch. Now the other leg was itching too. Finally I pulled up my pant leg to have a look. A line of red sores and smaller red bumps—what's up? I showed my friend—"looks like bed bug bites," he said. Oh, oh—bed bugs, how could I have bed bugs?

I looked on the internet, to find that:

- Bed bugs are small parasitic insects about the size and shape of an apple seed that feed on human blood, causing skin rashes, allergic symptoms, and psychological effects—they've been around for thousands of years!
- In Canada, we thought bed bugs were gone decades ago, but they have been coming back.
- Bed bugs can live in crevices and other small places for at least a year without eating and, being insects, they multiply quickly. Professional treatment is often required to get rid of them permanently.

When I got home that day, I looked at the sheets on my bed—sure enough, there were some trails of blood (my blood). Quickly I pulled all the sheets off and looked down at the corner where the label was—bugs.



About 10 of them. I wasn't sure what to do—should I just vacuum them up, squish them, or what? I was embarrassed about the bugs—I'm not the world's greatest housekeeper, but I do sweep and vacuum regularly. I had no idea the bugs were there or that they were biting me. I thought that the saying "good night, sleep tight, don't let the bed bugs bite" was something from the distant past.

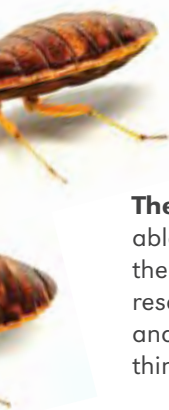
The information that I saw on the internet had told me that they're hard to get rid of, so I decided that I needed help. I called the manager of my building, and she called the pest control company, who came with a sniffer dog! Yikes, this is getting serious! The dog also found a couple of bugs down behind the dresser, which really depressed me.

The man from the pest control company gave me a pamphlet about how to prepare my apartment for treatment—several pages of instructions, involving a lot of vacuuming, removing everything from all the drawers, bagging, laundry, bagging again, sealing, moving the furniture away from the walls in the bedroom. I had to take a day off work to prepare things—I wanted to pick a time when the laundry room was empty, so I wouldn't have to talk to anyone about why I was doing nine loads instead of my usual two. I was still feeling pretty embarrassed about the whole thing, so I told my boss that I had to go take my mother to the doctor in another city.

My apartment was treated twice, about two weeks apart. I went to stay with a friend for the duration, as I just couldn't deal with it. It was a relief to be sleeping in a bed that I knew had no bed bugs.

It's now a couple of months later, and the treatment seems to have worked. My mattress and pillows are now wrapped in bed bug-proof covers. I have no more bites and no more itching. I'm really glad that I called the landlord and got this process moving—who knows how bad it would have been if I had delayed.





The person in this story was fortunate to have been able to get over her initial embarrassment and report the infestation to the landlord, who then acted quickly to resolve the problem. Many people don't report bed bugs and try to deal with the problem themselves, which makes things worse.

The bed bug problem is affecting housing co-ops throughout the province, not just in apartment buildings in big cities. If you don't have bugs yet, or they are just confined to a few units, there are preventive steps you can take. Talk to members about these quick and easy habits to help prevent and identify potential bed bug infestations:

- Don't bring home furniture and household objects that have been left lying in the street—they may be infested! Bed bugs can infest soft, upholstered furniture like couches, and they can also live in the joints of wood furniture like tables.
- Clear away clutter. Bed bugs can hide in small cracks and spaces such as under baseboards, so you need to be able to vacuum regularly in all these spaces, particularly in bedrooms.
- If you or your family notices small red bites on your skin or stains on the bedsheets that could be blood, inspect the mattress and bed frame for small rust

brown or black stains. If you find stains or bed bugs, or suspect that the bites are from bed bugs, notify the office right away so that an inspection can be scheduled.

- If the inspection shows that your unit is infested, do not remove any furniture without first wrapping it in plastic and marking it as infested. Do not take unwrapped furniture through common areas of the building because this will spread the infestation.
- Don't try to deal with the problem on your own—the office will give you information about how to prepare your unit for pest control treatment. Bed bugs normally do not come back if they have been professionally treated, but they will often recur if you try to take steps on your own without the proper information.

You can fight back against bed bugs. See the sidebar for information on Co-op Cost Cutters' bed bug services.

For more information, or to get help in organizing a member forum about bed bugs, contact your local federation or **Eliza Moore** at the CHF Canada office 416-366-1711 or 1-800-268-2537, ext. 239, e-mail emoore@chfcanada.coop.

CO-OP COST CUTTERS LAUNCHES BED BUG SERVICES

Co-op Cost Cutters has launched a suite of services to help co-ops fight bed bugs. Cost Cutters is a bulk buying program for members of local federations in Ontario and CHF Canada members in parts of the county without a local federation.

The new bed bug and pest control package is available in all parts of Ontario. It includes bed bug sniffing dogs, integrated pest management, new extreme heat treatments and assistance for members who need help in getting their unit ready for treatment. The package also includes a list of products from HD Supply that will help to fight and control the spread of these pests. Products such as mattress and box spring covers can help protect people from bites and prevent the spread of bed bugs.

Co-op members cannot order directly but can do so through their co-op office to get the program discounts.

For more information on the program, go to the Co-op Cost Cutters website (www.coopcostcutters.com). Information on the program is organized according to local federation or region. You can also contact your local federation or **Miriam Wohl**, Co-op Cost Cutters Co-ordinator at 416-465-8688, ext. 212. Or email miriam@coophousing.com.

