

Bed Bugs Website Qs and As

THE WEBSITE

What is this website all about?

With reports of increasing bed bug infestations and stakeholders expressing concern that people need guidance, the provincial government has developed a public education program to help Ontarians fight bed bugs. The website – www.bedbugsinfo.ca – will help the public do three key things effectively: Prevent, Identify and Act.

The website is a one-stop-shop for accurate information and simple, easy-to-use tips to combat infestations. It will also include resources, templates and pre-prepared materials for different stakeholders to use in various settings to bring the prevent/identify/act message to their own members.

Why did you feel you had to create this site? A lot of this information already exists on Toronto Public Health's (TPH) website as well as others.

The provincial government partnered with Toronto Public Health in the initial development of the website's content, as TPH had already done great work in this field due to local need. However, a central site is needed with content that is applicable across the whole province and with resources and information that would be able to serve residents and stakeholders, in different parts of the province.

How much did you spend to create this site?

The development costs of the web site are about \$100,000

Who was involved in the creation of the site?

Bed bug infestation is an issue that cuts across the jurisdiction of many provincial ministries. The following were involved in developing and vetting content for the website:

- Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
- Ministry of the Environment
- Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
- Ministry of Community and Social Services
- Ministry of Tourism and Culture
- Ministry of Consumer and Business Services
- Ministry of Health Promotion and Sport
- Ministry of Children and Youth Services

GENERAL QUESTIONS / \$5M FUND

How big a problem are bed bugs in Ontario?

In part because there is not a requirement to report bed bug infestations to any central authority and because there is a high level of stigma associated with them, it is very difficult to gather reliable data on the volume and occurrence of infestations. Health units have reported to the ministry both formal and anecdotal evidence of infestations in a wide range of settings including low-income/subsidized housing, shelters, rooming houses, private residences and long-term care homes.

To get a handle on this question however, collaborative work has been initiated between Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (OAHPP) and public health units to discuss how to better understand distribution of bed bugs, as well as causal linkages.

In September 2010, a public opinion poll conducted by IPSOS Reid showed that 2% of Ontario respondents reported they were currently experiencing a bed bug infestation and 4% reported having experienced a bed bug infestation in the past.

Can you get sick from bed bugs? Do bed bugs cause disease?

Although bed bugs and their bites are a nuisance, they are not known to spread disease in humans. Bed bug bites can be very itchy and irritating. Most welts heal in a few days but in unusual cases, the welt may persist for several weeks. The most significant health effects appear to be psychological, including stress, anxiety, depression, and fatigue caused by the presence of bed bugs in the home. Anxiety about being bitten can lead to sleeplessness, which can affect one's wellbeing. Properly and effectively responding to bed bugs helps reduce anxiety.

Aren't bed bugs more of a problem when people live in unsanitary conditions?

Even the cleanest homes or hotels can have bed bugs but regular inspection and housecleaning can prevent or help discover infestation in its early stages. Clean up clutter to help reduce the number of places bed bugs can hide. Sealing cracks and crevices with caulking can also help prevent bed bugs from coming into your home.

Is the Province offering any help to Ontarians who have problems with bed bugs? Any assistance to populations particularly vulnerable to infestations and who may not be able to afford the services of pest management companies?

The government is providing \$5 million in funding to support public health units in addressing bed bugs in their communities with a special emphasis for vulnerable populations.

What kinds of projects will this money be used for?

The province's 36 public health units can apply for funding to support bed bug-related programs along with local partners that emphasize education and awareness and/or provide supports to vulnerable populations.

What criteria will be used to evaluate a health unit's application to determine if funding will be allocated?

A process for applying for funding and for evaluating the applications will be developed early in 2011 and will be communicated to the public health units.

Is this \$5M funding going to be available to health units every year to fight bed bugs?

The \$5 million is being offered as one-time funding, available to public health units to support bed bug-related programs that emphasize education and awareness and/or provide supports to vulnerable populations.

Is there a cap for the amount that an individual health unit can apply for out of the total \$5 million fund?

A process for applying for funding and for evaluating the applications will be developed early in 2011 and will be communicated to the public health units. Each application will be evaluated in accordance with pre-determine criteria and the appropriate level of funding will be determined.

Is there an expectation that the \$5 million will be evenly distributed across the province?

No. The degree of bed bug infestations varies across the province. It is expected that the applications submitted by the public health units will reflect the degree of bed bug infestations in their health unit areas.

Why do you think that \$5 million in one-time funding for the whole province will be enough?

In part because there is not a requirement to report bed bug infestations to a central authority and because there is a high level of stigma associated with them, it is very difficult to gather reliable data on the volume and occurrence of infestations. Therefore, we do not know the exact extent of bed bug infestations across the province and are not able to estimate the exact cost of addressing this

issue provincially. Up to \$5 million is currently available on a one-time basis to support public health units in addressing this issue provincially. Funds will be allocated to public health units based on an assessment of need in their communities and the submission of an application to request necessary funds to support bed-bug related programs.

Toronto Public Health requested funding early in 2010 and this request was declined, why are you providing this funding now?

The issue of increasing bed bug infestations is being reported by various jurisdictions across the province. The government views this as a provincial issue that impacts many public health units. Therefore, the ability to request funding to support bed bug-related programs is being made available to all public health units across the province.

If a facility (e.g., a long-term care home or a subsidized housing facility) needs funds to get rid of bed bugs, can it apply to access funds out of the \$5 million?

The funding will be made available to public health units to support bed bug-related programs based on an assessment of need in their communities. The obligation of owners of buildings to keep their sites pest-free is not diminished.

Are you planning any other initiatives to deal with bed bugs?

The government is also launching a new website to inform Ontarians on how to identify bed bugs and what actions they can take. As well, the government is distributing the document *An Integrated Pest Management Program for Managing Bed Bugs* to stakeholders on how to identify bed bugs, perform inspections properly, prepare living areas for treatment, and carry out pest control treatments.

Once the OAHPP and other public health units get a better understanding of the prevalence of bed bug infestations, will the province look towards making the bed bud funding a yearly allocation?

Up to \$5 million is currently available on a one-time basis to support public health units in addressing this issue provincially. It is hoped that this funding will make a significant contribution to limiting and preventing new and worsening infestations.

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ENVIRONMENT

What is *An Integrated Pest Management Program for Managing Bed Bugs* about?

An Integrated Pest Management Program for Managing Bed Bugs covers the fundamental components of an integrated pest management (IPM) program that include planning, education, identification, inspection, record keeping, preparation, treatments and evaluation. It is applicable to all stakeholders who live in or manage residential and commercial dwellings, the pest management industry and other industry and government agencies and the most vulnerable people in society. This document stresses bed bug prevention through education of clients, residents, facilities managers, and landlords and provides an educational resource for professionals and service providers such as visiting nurses, social workers, tradespersons and others who must, as part of their job, visit or come into contact with persons who have a bed bug infestation. The document includes as an appendix an IPM Decision Flow Chart for Bed Bugs and a web-linked Additional Reading resource.

Does this information exist already?

There are numerous publications available on the internet that provide basic biology, inspection, prevention and control best practices for bed bugs. Some of these publications provide inaccurate or misleading information especially as it relates to control measures and pesticide use. The document *An Integrated Pest Management Program for Managing Bed Bugs* outlines the principles of IPM to prevent and manage bed bugs in all types of residential settings as it relates to Ontario pesticide legislation.

How are pest management operators regulated in Ontario?

A business that provides a service to manage pests and uses pesticides to do so must hold an Operator licence and have appropriate insurance coverage as prescribed in Ontario's Pesticides Act and Ontario Regulation 63/09. Also, employees of the company that use pesticides to manage bed bugs must be certified and licensed as a Structural licensed exterminator.

Can the province issue a list of the pest management companies it recommends so landlords, tenants and homeowners can know whom to trust?

No, the province can not provide a list of recommended companies. The document *An Integrated Pest Management Program for Managing Bed Bugs* provides information on what to look for when selecting a pest management company.

Can the province advise how much these pest management services should fairly cost so the public does not over-pay?

No, the province cannot advise the public as to what they should pay for a service call from a pest management company. The document recommends that customers obtain several quotes and compare what is being service is being provided for that cost and consult the document *An Integrated Pest Management Program for Managing Bed Bugs* as it provides information on what to look for when selecting a pest management company.

Where can the public complain and get their money back if they feel they have been provided an ineffective pest management service?

Complaints regarding the misuse of a pesticide by a pest management company or a landlord should be directed to the Ministry of the Environment [local district offices](#). After business hours, call the Ministry of the Environment's Pollution Hotline at 1-866-MOE-TIPS (1-866-663-8477). Issues regarding contracts, failure to honour guarantees or other service related issues should be addressed to the [Ministry of Consumer Services](#).