

# Bed bug education program promotes awareness, prevention in schools

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In communities where bed bugs are present, educating teachers and children about them is a powerful tool for prevention. Schools are often a primary avenue through which the pest can spread, as it hitches a ride from one place to another in clothes and book bags.

That's why a collaborative group of insect scientists, educators, [pest management](#) professionals, [public health officials](#), and social service agencies created Bed Bugs and Book Bags, an experiential-learning curriculum available for free from the Jacksonville Bed Bug Task Force and the University of Florida.

As reported in a two-part series in *American Entomologist*, the quarterly magazine of the Entomological Society of America, the curriculum was developed in response to a call to action from the Environmental Protection Agency in 2009. Between 2011 and 2014, Bed Bugs and Book Bags was built and tested on the principles of the 4-H experiential learning model and standards set by the Florida Department of Education.

More than just a pamphlet or flyer, the third- through fifth-grade curriculum is a 103-page document comprising a teacher's guide and three learning topics with 10 lesson plans. Learning concepts include hygiene and health, critical thinking and understanding, environmental understanding, and more. Hands-on activities include crosswords, word searches, scavenger hunts, and card games.

Pilot testing of the curriculum showed positive learning outcomes across a variety of audiences. Teachers and fifth-graders showed the strongest knowledge gains between pre- and post-curriculum tests, but 4-H agents, master gardeners, and even pest management professionals in the pilot study showed knowledge gains via the bed bug curriculum.

That points to the curriculum's value beyond its original young target audience. "Nearly half of the educators (47 percent) who downloaded the curriculum do not teach in typical classrooms. Their focus is on the general adult population," wrote authors Corraine A. McNeill of the Division of Science and Mathematics at Union College; Erin Harlow of the University of Florida Duval County Extension; and Rebecca Baldwin, Roberto M. Pereira, T. Grady Roberts, and Philip G. Koehler of the UF Department of Entomology in *American Entomologist*. "Based on observations from delivering the curriculum across Florida, information from the [curriculum](#) will be incorporated into programs in shelters, churches, and a wide range of community facilities."

Awareness and prevention education such as Bed Bugs and Book Bags align with the principles of [integrated pest management](#), a comprehensive, science-based approach to dealing with pests using strategies that are effective, economically sound, and ecologically compatible.

**More information:** Corraine A. McNeill et al, Development and Implementation of a Bed Bug IPM Enrichment Curriculum, Part I, *American Entomologist* (2016). [DOI: 10.1093/ae/tmv066](https://doi.org/10.1093/ae/tmv066)

Corraine A. McNeill et al. Development and Implementation of a Bed Bug IPM Enrichment Curriculum, Part II, *American Entomologist* (2016). [DOI: 10.1093/ae/tmw076](https://doi.org/10.1093/ae/tmw076)

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