

## Bed Bugs

Two types of 'bug' can be found in houses, particularly bedrooms. The least common of these is of little consequence as it rarely bites, but it can cause concern when found, as it looks



potentially nasty. This is the Martin Bug or Ked. Should a house martin or swallow nest in the eaves of a house sometimes the parasites on the birds can, by accident, get into a bedroom. It is in fact a fly with very tiny wings and not a true 'bug' unlike the Bed Bug which is blood-sucking parasite.

The Common Bed Bug, *Cimex lectularius*, found in dwellings is wingless and oval in shape, approximately 5mm ( $\frac{1}{4}$ inch) long, with six legs and two antennae. When unfed they are red-brown in colour and flat.

Their colour turns to red/purple after a blood meal and they become more rounded in shape, some 5-8mm long. Young bed bugs, the 'nymphs', resemble miniature versions of the adults and are pale yellow when unfed. These moult five times getting progressively larger as they moult.

### Where do they live?

Bed bugs live away from their host in crevices, hiding themselves in mattresses, within bed frames, under bed bases, within bed headboards, behind loose wallpaper, within paintings, wall sockets, and telephones. Also behind wall partitioning, suspended ceilings, skirting boards, on clothing or furnishings, and anywhere with a dark crack/crevice/seam providing a safe home and somewhere to lay their eggs. They like to stay close together. When disturbed, bed bugs emit a characteristic odour from their 'stink glands'.



### Life history

With frequent feeding, adults can live for up to 18 months. Eggs are somewhat like a rubber teat, the open end being covered by an egg-cap. In size they vary from 0.8 to 1.3mm long and 0.4 to 0.6mm broad. They hatch after about 10 to 20 days. At each stage they need to feed on blood, until they become adults after about nine to 18 weeks. A female can lay between 150 and 400 eggs in her life the rate of 3 to 4 eggs per day. Bed bugs do not lay eggs at temperatures below 10°C. Eggs hatch at temperatures above 23°C. Eggs hatch between 6 to 17 days after being laid.

In the course of about 10 minutes an adult bed bug can suck up to 7 times its own weight in blood, it then hides away and digests its meal, mates and lays eggs until hungry again.

### **What are the signs of having them?**

The presence of bedbugs in a room can be detected by the following:



bites on exposed areas of the body, ankles, waist, neck, arms  
blood spotting on bedding  
brown excrement spots close to where they live and on bedding  
whitish/opaque un-hatched and hatched eggs  
in heavy infestations there is a sweet musty likened to over-ripe raspberries

Bed bugs are not normally seen during the day.

They will not travel too far from their host, but can move into adjacent rooms via interconnecting ducting/spaces.

Anyone can get them. It is not just areas of poverty, poor housekeeping and uncleanness that bed bugs will occur. They are most likely to be transferred from place to place via infested linen, clothing, furniture and other articles. In hotels and hostels, housekeeping staff can unknowingly transfer bed bugs around the premises on all of the items mentioned above and guests can take bed bugs with them from hotel to hotel and eventually to their own home.

Second hand furniture from car-boot sales, charity shops, and auctions can also be a source of these parasites – the former being on the increase.

### **Are they a health hazard?**

Bed bugs are not known to carry disease. However, they feed on human blood, usually at night whilst people are asleep in their beds. They inject a fluid into their host to help get their blood meal – prevent blood coagulation. These bites cause irritation and itching. Some people are particularly sensitive to the bites and experience an allergy and inflammation, especially to the arms and shoulders. This can be quite severe and require medical attention.

### **How can I get rid of them?**

High standards of hygiene and housekeeping ensure that the presence of bed bugs is revealed at an early stage. Bed bugs can thrive where hygiene standards are poor and housekeeping sloppy, but remember too they can be picked up in second hand items.

In hotels and hostels housekeeping staff should be trained to identify the signs of bed bug infestation and whilst cleaning rooms should be alert management to the possibility of infestation. Infested bedding and furnishings should be laundered in a hot wash, and care should be taken not to aid dispersal of the infestation via laundry baskets. In severe cases, items of furniture will require removal and burning. Very cold weather can be used to kill the pests, but we rarely experience weather that is sufficiently cold. However, small items can be place in a deep freeze (a useful tool to kill pest infested clothing). Carpets should be steam-cleaned and vacuumed. You can use proprietary insecticides however council's pest control team provides a service for the treatment of bedbugs. Treatment consists of the application of an insecticide usually in a spray form, in and around the infested areas. The insecticides the council uses are

the safest available and do not pose any risk to people or pets except fish which are very sensitive to insecticides. You will, however, be left with an information sheet about the insecticide used by the operative. The pest control officer will be able to give on site advice about any precautions that the occupant needs to take before and after treatment. It is sometimes necessary to treat more than one room if there is a severe infestation.

If you do attempt treatment yourself, when using pesticides always follow the instructions on the label.

After the treatment you will usually notice a reduction in the number of bed bugs within two to three days. It may take longer to kill off all the insects, as their eggs will continue to hatch out. The treatment is very effective but there are occasions when it does not work. If you are still seeing bed bugs two weeks after the treatment the council may well have to repeat the treatment.