

Bed bug Guidance

What are bed bugs?

Bed bugs are nocturnal parasitic insects that feed exclusively on blood. They most commonly establish in beds and bedroom furniture where they have regular access to a host (often human) for blood meals.

Adult bed bugs are oval and flattened like a small brownish-red disc, often described as the size of an apple seed and measuring between 4-6mm in length. Their shed skins are lighter brown and look like flaky exoskeletons. Bed bugs do not have wings, but they have six thick, well-developed legs, which enable them to crawl up most vertical surfaces. Their elongated eggs are whitish cream, developing a darker colour as they get ready to hatch into larvae.

The early stages of the bed bug are called nymphs; these are tiny, making them hard to detect with the naked eye. Aside from being smaller and paler, they look the same as adult bed bugs.

The bed bug's life cycle develops in stages and can take 6 to 10 months. Female bed bugs lay 200 – 500 eggs over two months in batches of 10 to 50. The eggs are sticky and attach to items of furniture or fittings in clusters.

Depending on conditions, eggs can hatch in about a week, and the newly hatched nymphs moult (shed) five times before reaching maturity. A blood meal is needed between each moult, and under favourable conditions with a ready supply of blood, they can mature in as little as a month and produce multiple generations per year.

Bed bugs respond to the warmth and carbon dioxide of a host and quickly locate a suitable feeding site. They can be in an inactive state for weeks or months and quickly “wake” when they detect biological signatures like CO₂.

The typical lifespan of a bed bug is about ten months, but in the absence of a host all life cycles of the bed bug can enter a stage of dormancy (called diapause) which can last for several months, allowing them to survive without a host for extremely long periods of time.



Image 1: A well established bed bug infestation- adult insects, nymphs, eggs and faecal spots are visible.

How are Bed bugs spread?

Bed bugs are expert travellers and are most often spread via luggage and travellers belongings.

In 9 out of 10 cases, bed bugs are found around the bed as they want to be close to their host. That's why used bedding can carry bed bugs that risk being spread by hotel cleaning routines. Eggs, nymphs and adult bed bugs can also be carried in the brushes of vacuum cleaner nozzles, from one room to another, from one floor to another. Vacuum cleaners that are used on different floors and laundry bags filled with dirty bedding, lying on the floor in hotel corridors, are all warning signs. Bed bugs can also spread to nearby rooms on their own.

It's impossible to prevent a bed bug infestation as they are generally spread through bad luck.

Why should you aim to prevent bedbugs?

The main reason for controlling bed bugs is that they bite.

Bed bugs can harbour various pathogens, but transmission to humans has not been proven and is believed to be unlikely. Although there are no known disease risks associated with bed bug bites, they can cause acute irritation and distress. Everyone reacts differently to a bed bug bite; some develop red, irritating marks and lumps, while others do not react to the bites. The bites can be itchy and cause painful swelling, with excessive scratching sometimes leading to infections.

Bed bugs also cause mental distress and can, in extreme cases, lead to ongoing delusional parasitosis, even after successful treatment has eradicated the infestation.

Bed bugs can be a costly pest to a hospitality business. As well as the cost of replacement furniture, mattresses, towels and bedding, or having to close for extensive treatment, a ruined reputation can cause a loss of future revenue. Often the adjoining hotel rooms on the sides, above and below, also need to be closed off and treated.

If customers experience a bed bug infestation in the premises you manage, they are likely to complain and request a refund. But they may also review your company negatively online and share their experience on social media. The worst-case scenario is that the media reports on the story and causes further reputational damage.

You may end up lowering the value of your accommodation to fill rooms. And if your establishment is part of a chain, it could affect other locations in your group, as the issue of pests is associated with the brand name rather than the individual business.

Customers taking hospitality businesses to court over bed bugs is not unheard of, and there are even lawyers who specialise in bed bug compensation cases.

What should I be doing about Bed bugs in my Hotel/ Bed and Breakfast?

Use good maintenance practices to prevent pest problems.

- Caulk around skirtings, loose tiles, chair rails and mouldings, around outlets and fill cracks.

- Remove carpeting where possible.
- Address any clutter or storage issues.

Develop a 'Bed Bug Action Plan' for your buildings. Include strategies for:

- Responding to reports or complaints.
- Containing and eradicating infestations.
- Disposing of infested furniture where required.
- Educating and training staff.
- Appeasing affected guests.
- Responding to reviews and social media.

Staff should be trained on the signs of bed bugs so that they can quickly identify an issue before it spreads. They should be advised on how to recognise a bed bug problem and what to do when a problem is suspected or confirmed in a room. Ensure your staff are aware of the below signs and that they carry out regular checks during the course of their housekeeping duties;

- Small reddish-brown clusters or dark faecal spots (about 1mm wide) that look like an ink dot are usually found on the bed frame, upholstery or the bottom side of the mattress
- Small blood smears on the bed linen or headboard
- Bed bug moult skins, pale-white eggs, empty eggshells are quite small but still visible to the human eye
- And the most obvious but not always the first sign you find - seeing the small brown insects themselves, in and around the bed frame or sleeping area.

Routine housekeeping measures can reduce the risk of bedbugs establishing and spreading. Cleaning staff with a bit of pest awareness training can be a fantastic first line of defence against bed bug infestations. However, on the report of a bed bug concern a thorough check for bed bugs must be carried out.

How do I check for bed bugs?

In the first instance turn off the lights and use a torch to inspect the room for the best chance of spotting the nocturnal bugs. Thoroughly check the mattress – Bed bugs are most commonly found in the crevices and seams of mattresses and sleeping areas.



Images 2 & 3: bed bugs will typically hide in crevices, cracks and seams. In the early stages of an infestation, you may only find faecal spots on fabrics such as the mattress, curtains, cushions and seating. These will look like small ink spots.

It is important to note that bed bugs may hide elsewhere in an affected room, make sure to check skirtings for cracks and crevices, picture frames, curtains and wall hangings, decorations, lamps, plug sockets, and surrounding furniture including wardrobes and seating.



Images 4 & 5: Bed bugs will also harbour in wood, plastics, décor, wall cracks and sockets.

For some businesses, a proactive monitoring regime by a professional pest management company can be the best way to help detect early signs.

What do I do if I find bed bugs?

In the first instance, any impacted guests should be relocated to alternative accommodation. It would be wise to offer to clean or steam treat the guests clothing, suitcases and other belongings before they are relocated, so that they do not transport insects to another room.

A professional inspection of the room and surrounding rooms should be arranged.

Any affected room should be thoroughly inspected, all soft furnishings isolated and subjected to a hot wash (60°C or higher). Do not use infested rooms until a pest control professional has confirmed them free of insects.

It is not advisable to attempt to treat the bed bugs yourself. Professional pest control services should be engaged, to treat the affected areas effectively and safely.

When selecting a pest controller, ensure they have experience with bed bug treatments. Be wary of 'guarantees' and single treatment solutions, as bed bugs are particularly difficult to successfully and quickly eradicate. Treatments for bed bugs should be multi-pronged; with the joint use of traps, insecticide sprays, insect growth regulators, non toxic dust treatments (such as diatomaceous earth) and multiple follow-up treatments. Affected rooms should be monitored using appropriate traps and inspection for at least 10 months following an issue.

For advice on finding a pest controller, the BPCA website provides referrals for suitable qualified pest control experts in your area.

<https://bpca.org.uk/find>

A final useful note:

Bed bugs can easily be confused with several common domestic pests, including fleas, dermestid beetles and spider beetles.

Fleas:

Bed bugs are unable to jump and are flattened horizontally (they appear round from the top and flat from the side). Fleas however, will jump when disturbed, and are flattened vertically (they appear narrow from the top). Flea bites and bed bug bites may appear very similar, but bed bug bites tend to occur in rows or clusters (often in three, as the bed bug has a 'breakfast, lunch and dinner').

Dermestid and spider beetles:

These are housekeeping related pests, often establishing in areas where food debris and crumbs have collected. They do not bite. Both are larger than bed bugs and have longer antennae.



(1) Bed bug



(2) flea



(3) dermestid beetle
& larvae



(4) spider
beetle.