

BED BUGS (*Cimex lectularius*)



Treating bed bug bites

Many people do not react to bedbug bites or only have the odd spot, so treatment may not be needed.

If you do develop bumps that are very itchy, your GP may prescribe some mild steroid cream to apply to your skin, or your pharmacist should be able to recommend antihistamine tablets to relieve the itch. Your skin should clear up within a week. A few people will develop a more severe rash of fluid-filled blisters that can become infected if scratched, requiring antibiotics. EPM would recommend seeking advice from your doctor whatever the suspected symptoms.

Bedbugs (*Cimex lectularius*) are small blood-sucking insects that can live in cracks and crevices in and around your bed. Attracted by your body heat and carbon dioxide, they crawl out at night to bite your exposed skin and feed on your blood, just as mosquitoes do. Not everyone develops a skin reaction to bedbug bites, but some people will develop itchy red bumps one to nine days later, usually on the face, neck, hand or arm. These are often mistaken for mosquito bites, but while mosquito bites tend to be random in pattern, bedbug bites more often occur in straight lines. The media has recently reported a huge increase in the number of bedbug infestations around the world, particularly in America. It is likely that tourists and an increasing resistance to insecticides are the main reasons for this. Bedbugs are not dangerous. They do not transmit any human diseases and most people do not develop any serious skin reaction. However, their presence can be upsetting and stressful, and you should take action straight away.

If you think you have a bedbug infestation, read the advice below and contact EPM Ltd who is a member of the British Pest Control Association.

About bedbugs

Adult bedbugs look a bit like lentils and are visible to the naked eye. They are oval-shaped, flat and reddish-brown, and up to 5mm long. Females lay 200-500 eggs over a two-month period. These white specks stick to surfaces and are very difficult to spot. They hatch to form tiny straw-coloured insects that take about six to eight weeks to grow into adults. As they grow, they shed their skin. This looks like mottled brown shells on your mattress. Bedbugs need to feed on blood to be able to mature, but they are very resilient. Adults can survive for up to a year without feeding. They are not attracted to dirt, so a bedbug infestation is not a sign of an unclean home.

How to spot them

- look for any unexplained skin rash or itchy bump (although not everyone develops this)
- look out for black spots on your mattress and other furniture – this could be their dried faeces
- look for mottled shells that bedbugs may have shed
- check your sheets for blood spots where you may have rolled over and squashed a bug after it had fed
- inspect all the crevices and joints of your mattress and furniture using a torch, and see if you can spot any bugs

Where to find them

Because their bodies are flat, bedbugs can squeeze into the smallest crevice or crack, such as a mattress seam or the joints of a bed frame. This can make them very difficult to find. They tend to prefer fabric or wood over plastic and metal, and often hide near to where you sleep, for example under the mattress or along the headboard. However, they are willing to travel several feet if necessary to reach you, so they can also be found away from the bed in other furniture, along the edges of carpets and even behind mirrors or inside smoke alarms. In fact, they can be found in almost any place in the bedroom where they will not be disturbed.

How bedbugs spread

Once introduced into your home, bedbugs can spread easily from room to room. They do not fly or jump, but can crawl quickly. They can soon spread within a building by getting through holes in walls or pipes, and can potentially invade blocks of flats, hotels or hospitals. The bugs can also be transported in luggage, clothing, furniture and bedding from one building to the next. This makes it easy for tourists and commuters to unknowingly spread bedbugs.

Play your part in the elimination process.



Getting rid of the bugs

It can be extremely difficult to get rid of a bedbug infestation from your home. Pest technicians can usually get rid of bedbugs with two or three treatments. However, it must be noted that particularly persistent infestations may need several treatments over a period of time. *(Treatments may need to be re-scheduled if the advice below is not followed and may incur additional costs)*

The most important element of the elimination process is the initial inspection. All areas of the property requires a thorough inspection including beds, headboards, wardrobes, drawers, pictures, sockets, fire alarms, etc. Once the infestation has been identified the following precautions should be taken.

1. Heat kills bed bugs. All clothes and bed linen need to be washed at high temperature or put them in a dryer on a hot setting for at least 30 minutes to kill the bugs. It is important to isolate these garments and place in sealed bags to prevent re-infestation.
2. Dismantle your bed and bedroom furniture and closely inspect every seam, crevice and joint using a bright torch. Use a vacuum cleaner with a hose to suck up any bugs you can see, but bear in mind you may not be able to find them all. All floors require a full vacuum and dispose of the contents of the vacuum cleaner in a sealed bag.
3. Please leave the bed in bits to allow each part to be thoroughly treated with a residual insecticide by the technician.
4. Be prepared to throw away a mattress or other items if it appears to be heavily infested.
5. All affected areas will be treated with a residual insecticide to ensure any remaining bugs that cannot be found, will be destroyed.
6. Once all areas have been treated the property will be fogged with an insecticide. These provoke any insects into movement and they will subsequently move onto the residual insecticide.
7. The property should be vacated when the fogging process begins. It is recommended that the property remains empty for 3-4 hours but more if required.
8. The property requires venting before re-entry. Open windows and doors and allow a breeze to go through the property to disperse any remaining odours.
9. Do not allow children or pets back into the property until all areas are dry. Rooms sprayed with any insecticide can only be reoccupied by children or animals once the sprayed surfaces are dry. Timescales will normally be communicated during the initial inspection/treatment dependant on the insecticides being used.
10. Once vented/cleared and treated surfaces are dry, furniture can be re-assembled. Clean sheets must be placed on treated mattresses before being used. Place clean covers over furniture before use allowing the insecticide to continue working. Ensure ALL food preparation areas and worktops are cleaned before use.
11. Do not wash treated surfaces or vacuum carpets for as long as possible, normally at least 48/72 hours.
12. An insecticide information sheet will be supplied by the technician before leaving the site.

Preventing an infestation

It can be difficult to avoid bedbugs as they can be transported so easily. The best thing you can do is inspect your mattress regularly for telltale signs and take immediate action if necessary. Avoid buying second-hand mattresses and be wary of old beds you might be using in rented accommodation.