

# PEST CONTROL ADVICE SHEET

## BED BUGS



### INTRODUCTION

This leaflet is produced by the Council to give information about common domestic pests, including how to identify the pest and how it may be eradicated.

Many people have never seen a bed bug. Improvements in hygiene and the use of DDT after the Second World War had virtually eradicated them .... until recently. Their recurrence is largely blamed on international travel and they are increasingly found in homes, hotels, dormitories, universities and on public transport.

### DESCRIPTION

The bed bug (*Cimex lectularius*) is a nocturnal insect that feeds on human blood. Adult bed bugs are about 5mm (1/4 inch) long. They are reddish brown in colour (becoming purple after feeding) with flat, oval bodies. They have short functionless wings and are therefore likely to be found close to their host. Their legs are well developed, enabling them to crawl up vertical surfaces.

Bed bugs can be mistaken for the smaller "Martin bug" which can enter bedrooms from the nests of house martins (usually after the birds have left the nest and the insect cannot feed from the birds). **NOTE:** *It is illegal to disturb or remove Martin nests until the birds have left the nest.*

### LIFESTYLE

Bed bugs generally emerge to feed at night and are most active just before dawn. During the day they will hide in the darkness of the mattress or bed frame, behind wallpaper, pictures and furniture. Bed bugs take 3-10 minutes to engorge and can ingest up to 7 times their body weight in one feed. However they can survive for 6 months or longer without feeding.

Depending upon the temperature and food supply, between 2 and 4 generations will be produced annually. The adult lays eggs at the rate of 3-4 per day which are cemented into cracks and crevices close to the host. The young insects (nymphs) resemble the adults and will begin feeding immediately. They mature in about 11 weeks.

The spread of bed bugs is usually due to the movement of furnishings and furniture, personal belongings or luggage which has been transported from an infected area.

### SIGNIFICANCE

Bed bugs feed on human blood by piercing the skin and sucking blood. Their bites, although painless, can cause severe irritation and inflammation which will differ according to the individual's sensitivity. In some cases this can also result in loss of sleep, lack of energy and listlessness, particularly in children. If the infestation is severe there can be a risk of anaemia, although this is rare.

### HYGIENE AND MANAGEMENT

High standards of hygiene are unlikely to be an adequate control on their own. However they will help to monitor any infestation and to show the location of harbourages.

If you suspect a bed bug infestation, a close inspection of the mattress, particularly around the seams and the back of the headboard, should reveal their presence.

The use of a pyrethroid-based aerosol sprayed lightly around the room in accordance with the label instructions may help as the bugs will be displaced from their hiding places.

The finding of eggs, bugs or egg cases as well as the excrement will indicate their presence and any infected bedding should be laundered and tumble dried (if possible) or burnt and the infected room thoroughly cleaned, especially any cracks in furniture, ensuring that all dust and fluff is removed.

The use of a vacuum cleaner for this will prove to be more effective than the use of a duster. If the vacuum cleaner you are using has a bag then this should be removed and disposed of, preferably by burning immediately upon finishing cleaning, to prevent any eggs hatching and any bugs escaping back into the premises.

## **INSECTICIDES**

To eradicate the infection, it will be necessary to treat the premises thoroughly with suitable insecticides, including the beds, any other furniture and harbourages in the fabric of the infested room(s). A professional pest control company should be asked to carry out this work as it does require a professional approach.

Eliminating bed bugs from a mattress and soft furnishing is difficult, especially if there are holes or tears in the fabric. For this reason, pest control companies often recommend that infested beds, sofas, etc, are wrapped in plastic and disposed of.

Do not attempt DIY pest control using a surface spray on bed linen or mattresses as this could cause a health and safety danger.