

PEST CONTROL

Bed Bugs

Key facts

In recent years, bed bugs (*Cimex lectularius*) have become increasingly prevalent across the world. They are usually transported unknowingly in people's luggage or via infested beds and furniture. During the night, they feed on human or animal blood; during the day, they hide in crevices in beds, items of furniture or walls. Infestations have nothing to do with unhygienic living conditions and can affect anyone. Infestations can be properly treated only by a professional pest control service.

Appearance

Adult bed bugs are reddish-brown in colour. Bugs that have recently fed are almost 10 mm long; unfed bugs are 4-6 mm long. Their flat bodies allow them to hide in small cracks. Young bed bugs look similar to adults, but are smaller and lighter in colour. Unlike other kinds of bugs, adult bed bugs do not have wings. Their oval-shaped eggs are whitish in colour, about 2.5 mm in length and with a diameter of 0.5 mm.

Feeding and habits

Bed bugs feed on the blood of human beings and house pets, usually at night. The feeding process takes between three and 15 minutes. Adult bugs feed every three to seven days. The bugs live in rooms where people sleep. During the day, they hide in crevices in bed frames and furniture, in mattresses and skirting boards, under pictures and wallpaper, etc.

Bed bugs spread gradually and may move from one apartment to another, though only when the infestation is severe, when the host is suddenly absent or when attempts are made to eradicate them using insecticide sprays.

Life cycle

Over the course of their lives, females can lay up to 500 eggs. In favourable conditions, bed bugs can reach maturity within two months, although this can take as little as four weeks where temperatures exceed 25°C and the bugs are able to feed frequently. Adult bugs can survive in cold temperatures for long periods and can go without feeding for up to six months. They live for about a year.

Impact on health

Bed bugs feed at night and their bite usually goes unnoticed. In searching for capillaries, they often bite exposed areas of skin (the neck, face, arms, knees, etc.) a number of times. A skin reaction to the saliva they inject develops only after the bugs have left the host and often hours or days later. These itchy, swollen welts can last for several days. Bed bug bites may cause sensitive or allergic individuals to develop skin inflammations over wide areas, but this is uncommon. About 20% of people have no reaction to bed bug bites. Bed bugs are not known to transmit any diseases.

Combating bed bugs

Before starting any treatment, it is first necessary to find bed bugs or traces of their presence. Treatment should not be undertaken until such evidence is found. Insect sprays can not be used to treat an infestation; the bugs will just move to other parts of the apartment or building. Treatment should always be left to a professional pest control service. Solicit quotations from a number of licensed Swiss companies. The aim should be to completely eradicate all bed bugs from

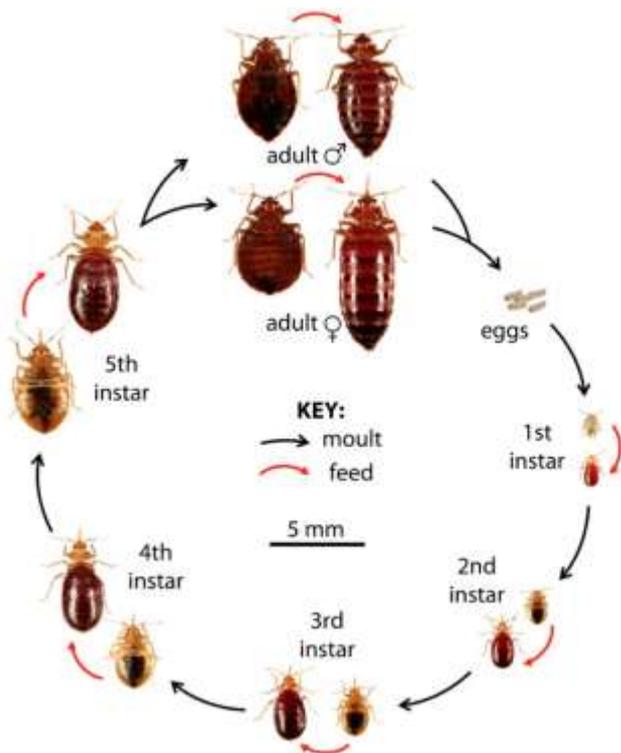


Illustration: Bed Bug Foundation

the property. In most cases, more than one treatment is needed. As an alternative to insecticide treatment, heat treatment may sometimes be undertaken by a pest control company.

Treatment will not prevent new infestations.

Prevention

Take care to examine second-hand beds and furniture for bed bugs or faecal traces before taking them home. Wash second-hand clothing at 60° C. Even used packing boxes can be infested with bed bugs. If your apartment is infested, do not place furniture in the stairwell, cellar or loft space, otherwise the infestation may spread to neighbouring apartments. When disposing of furniture, please clearly mark items as **infested with bed bugs** or make them unusable, so that others do not take them home.

Signs of a bed bug infestation

During the day, bed bugs hide in mattresses, bed frames and crevices near the bed. Faecal traces (small dark spots – see photo, right), blood spots or itchy



bites can all be signs of a bed bug infestation. A good way of confirming an infestation is by having the apartment checked by a specially trained bed bug detection dog. This may show that the infestation is limited to certain rooms or objects, which can make treatment cheaper and more efficient. It might also show that there are no bed bugs in the property.

What should I do about bed bugs in my hotel room?

First, inform the hotel management. Ensure you are given another room, preferably not next door to the infested room. Be careful with your luggage and sleeping bag: bed bugs can crawl inside and be carried on with you. Place your luggage as far away from the bed as possible and close all the zips.

What should I do after a night in a bug-infested room?

Immediately empty out your bags on a balcony or in the laundry room. Any clothes that can not be washed immediately should be placed in rubbish bags sealed with tape. Spray your empty luggage out of doors with a commercial insecticide spray and then air it in the cellar or on a balcony. To treat infested clothing, wash at 60° C for 30 minutes or wash twice at 40° C, tumble-dry at 45° C for 30 minutes or place in the freezer at -17° C for 24 hours.

Your rights

If more than one apartment in the building is infested with bed bugs, the property manager is required to appoint a pest control company to deal with the infestation. In such cases, all the apartments in the building must be checked for bed bugs. The costs incurred can not be passed on to tenants. See the leaflet, *Pest infestation: your rights*. Residential properties are governed by Articles 256, 257f, g, h, 258 and 259 of the Swiss Code of Obligations.

We are here to help

Call us, or send or bring in insects for us to inspect. We provide free advice to residents of Zurich.

Pest control help desk:

Isabelle Landau Lüscher, Dr Gabi Müller, Marcus Schmidt

Telephone and personal appointments for residents of Zurich:

Walchestr. 31, 2nd floor, office 232

Tel. 044 412 28 38

Mo – Fr: 1.30 pm – 2.30 pm

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8006 Zürich

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