

Kev's Guide to - Bed Bugs

Bed bugs are small parasitic insects that feed on human blood by piercing the skin. They do not live on humans or burrow into the skin.

They are very mobile, but only move short distances to feed, so are commonly found near food (blood) sources.

Generally, bed bugs are more of a nuisance pest than a serious health threat. There is no evidence to indicate that they transmit any infectious disease.

Bed bugs can live up to six months at room temperature and can survive for long periods without a blood meal.

What are the signs of a bed bug infestation?

Signs that you may have a bed bug infestation include, live bed bugs or cast skins, eggs, dark spots of bed bug excrement or blood. These can be found on bed sheets, mattresses, skirting boards or in cracks and crevices, distinct 'bug' smell can detect if the infestation is severe, you may also notice bite marks on your skin, although 1 in 5 people bitten may not experience a reaction and the bite may not be noticed for up to 9 days. Skin reactions include redness, swelling and wheals up to 2cm in size, itching and burning sensations. Humans tend to be bitten most often on the shoulders and arms, in distinctive lines.

Non-chemical treatments

These are safe and effective in reducing bed bug numbers prior to insecticide treatment.

Regular inspections of mattresses and other areas are essential. If bed linen is infested, wash the items in hot water and then tumble dry on high for at least 40 minutes. A steam iron may also be used on the seams of mattresses or other items where there is stitching or folds in material. The use of high temperature low vapour steam on other areas such as mattresses should also be considered.

If infested items are taken out of a room, the bed bugs can fall off and spread the infestation. It is always advisable to treat such items before disposal and these should be wrapped in plastic before removal from the

room. For linen, carry the items to the washing machine in garbage bags then dispose of the bags immediately.

Thorough vacuuming of carpet edges, skirting boards and all cracks and crevices using a vacuum cleaner with a disposable dust bag is important for removing bed bugs and their eggs. Seal the dust bag in plastic and dispose in your council refuse bin.

Disposal of infested objects such as bed heads to landfill is an option, where other methods have not been effective. It is important to wrap the object first so as not to spread the infestation during transport.

Chemical treatments

A range of low toxicity products such as synthetic pyrethroids and carbamates are available for use indoors to control bed bugs. Regular pesticides do not kill bed bug eggs, so residual products are more effective than non-residual products, as these will kill immature bed bugs once the eggs have hatched. Always read the product label before purchase to make sure that the product you choose can be used for bed bugs. Note that some products are only available to licensed pest management technicians.

These products can be used to treat cracks and crevices where bed bugs are found and should not be applied to bedding where human contact may occur. They are designed to be applied to surfaces where bed bugs may be harbouring and should not be used as space sprays.

After the initial treatment, a follow-up inspection should be carried out to determine if further bed bugs or eggs are present. In most cases, repeat treatments are required to control bed bugs. Bed bug mattress covers enclose the mattress and should be fitted after treatment and left on the mattress for 12 months.

Approx. price \$250 per visit excluding mattress protector.