



## Bed Bugs: Prevention and treatment

Bed bugs are irritating blood-feeding insects that hide in cracks and crevices and come out at night to feed.

Bed bug populations have grown world-wide, possibly due to changes in pesticide use, a lack of knowledge of bed bugs in the pest control industry, the second-hand furniture trade and increased international travel.

### What are bed bugs?

Bed bugs (*Cimex lectularius* or *Cimex hemipterus*) are oval, wingless insects that are rusty brown in colour and around 4-5 mm long when fully grown.

Bed bugs are thin and flattened, allowing them to hide in narrow cracks and crevices.

They are blood feeding insects that prefer to bite humans but will also feed on other warm blooded animals.

As their name suggests, bed bugs generally feed at night when people are in bed.

### Where do bed bugs live?

Bed bugs will hide (and lay eggs) in a variety of household objects close to where humans sleep such as mattresses, bed frames, furniture, behind skirting boards, loose wallpaper and floorboards, and in cracks and crevices of walls.

Bed bugs emerge at night to feed and then return to their hiding spot for the day to digest the blood meal.

Bed bugs will come out to feed during the day if they are particularly hungry.

### Identifying bed bugs

Bed bugs often make their presence known through continuous biting and irritation.

Some people do not react to bed bug bites, while others show a delayed response (up to nine days) or an

immediate response with great discomfort and loss of sleep.

Bed bugs will usually bite on the arms and shoulders (or any exposed, bare skin surface) which may result in small areas of swelling and itching of the skin.

Heavy bed bug infestations are often associated with a distinctive sickly sweet smell and blood spotting may be evident on mattresses and/or bedding and nearby furniture.

An infestation of bed bugs can be confirmed through the microscopic identification of collected specimens including live or dead adults, nymphs and eggs.

Although there are two species of bed bugs that will feed on humans, but one, *C. hemipterus*, is generally confined to tropical areas of Australia.

### Can bed bugs make me sick?

While bed bugs can be quite irritating, they are not known to transmit disease.

Intense itching of the bites can result in a secondary skin infection in severe cases.

### Where do bed bugs come from?

Bed bug populations have undergone a recent world-wide resurgence.

Increasing numbers of bed bug infestations have been reported in Australia, often in accommodation



# Public Health Fact Sheet

venues such as backpackers' hostels and motels.

Factors linked to the recent increase in bed bug infestations include changes in pesticide use, a lack of knowledge of bed bugs in the pest control industry and an increase in international travel and second hand furniture trading.

Bed bugs can be transported long distances in the seams of clothing, luggage, bedding and furniture.

Adult bugs are able to survive more than a year without a blood meal.

## How do I get rid of bed bugs?

If you suspect you have bed bugs, look thoroughly in the areas they like to hide.

Remove mattresses from bed frames to complete a thorough check of the bedroom.

Infested areas including all possible hiding places should be treated with an appropriate insecticide.

There are a variety of products available for bed bug treatment (usually synthetic pyrethroids) but if you are unsure about effective treatment or if the infestation is heavy, it is advisable to contact a pest control company.

Bed bugs can often be difficult to eradicate because their hiding spots are hard to find or inaccessible.

Repeat application of a treatment product may be necessary, depending on the chemical used and the success of the original application.

Thoroughly vacuum the infested area including the mattress and place the contents of the vacuum cleaner bag in a sealed plastic bag for disposal.

Clothes and bedding suspected of being infested should be washed in hot water (at least 60°C) and/or heated ironing or drying.

Mattresses can be difficult to treat effectively and may require specialised advice from a pest control company.

Reduce the number of hiding spots available to bed bugs by eliminating cracks and crevices.

## Further information

If you believe you have a bed bug infestation at home or have stayed in an accommodation venue that is infested, contact:

- your local council Environmental Health Officer
- the Department of Health on 8226-7100 or go to our website: [www.health.sa.gov.au/pehs/environmental-health-index.htm](http://www.health.sa.gov.au/pehs/environmental-health-index.htm).
- contact a licensed pest control operator for assistance with chemical treatment.

## Contact

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Last revised October 2008

