

## History

Bed bugs are found worldwide and are particularly associated with budget hotel accommodation in large cities. They are perhaps the most distressing of all insect infestations on account of the itchiness and swelling associated with their bites.

## Appearance

Bed bugs are oval flattened insects approximately 5mm in length. They are light brown in appearance when unfed, changing to a deep purple immediately after the ingestion of a blood meal. Adults are wingless and flattened, unless recently fed.

## Life Cycle

The female of the species will lay approximately 200 eggs during her lifetime, at a rate of 5 per day. These eggs are white with a tiny cap and will be glued to the crevices and harbourages in which the bed bugs live. The rate at which the eggs hatch is temperature dependent, below 13°C the eggs will not hatch whereas above 25°C the eggs will hatch within about a week. The young bed bugs take between a few weeks and several months to attain adulthood via a series of 5 moults. The time taken is dependent on both temperature and the availability of food.

## Habits and Habitat

Bed bugs are typically nocturnal emerging just before dawn to feed on their human hosts. Feeding will typically take place every two to three days and will take approximately 10 minutes, at which time the bed bug may ingest 7 its their own body weight in blood. They will also feed on dogs, cats and rodents. Bed bugs hide by day in cracks and crevices in beds, furniture, wallpaper, skirting boards and electrical fittings. One reason why bed bug infestations are so difficult to eradicate is that they are highly resistant to low temperatures and capable of surviving for up to eighteen months without food.

After feeding the bed bug will evacuate much of the blood ingested. This leads to the characteristic spotting of infested furniture. The spots will smear when rubbed with a finger.

## Disease, Risk and Damage

There are no specific diseases associated with bed bugs and their importance is related mostly to the unpleasant irritation following their bites. The itchiness and swelling occurs due to the saliva that the bedbug injects into the host to prevent the blood from clotting.

A severe bed bug infestation may result in sleep disturbance to the host and is extremely unpleasant. Heavy infestations are characterised by a sweet almond type odour.



## Control

Bed bugs can be very difficult to eradicate however control may be achieved by the use of powerful broadband insecticides. Such insecticides are only available for professional use. Therefore, unless the infestation is minimal, the use of a reputable professional pest control company is advisable. When spraying with insecticide particular attention is paid to the bed frames, skirting boards, wall switches and any cracks or crevices in which the bedbugs are likely to be hiding.

It is extremely important to recognise that the eradication of bedbugs is not achieved immediately after a course of treatment. The bed bugs hide deep within harbourages in inaccessible areas. Therefore the bed bug will only come into contact with the insecticide when it emerges to feed. The bed bug will only emerge to feed if it senses the presence of a blood meal. It is the carbon dioxide that humans exhale coupled with the warmth of the body that draws the bedbug out of its harbourage.

For this reason it is recommended that people sleep in affected rooms after they have been treated. Otherwise the bedbug will not emerge from its harbourage and so will not come into contact with the insecticide.