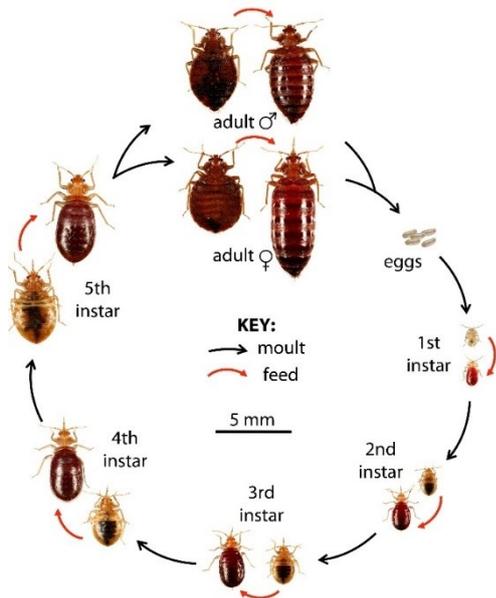


The Bed Bug

The bed bug (*Cimex lectularius*) has spread extensively around the world. It usually spreads via luggage or infested beds and furniture. It sucks blood from humans and animals at night. During the day it hides near the bed in dark cracks of furniture or on the bed slats, under or on the mattress. Bedbugs have nothing to do with unsanitary conditions – anyone can be affected. In case of infestation, only professional pest control will help.

Appearance

Adult bed bugs are reddish brown, flat and resemble an apple seed. They are 4 to 6 mm long, reaching a length of almost 10 mm when fully fed on blood. Young bed bugs are similar in appearance to adult bugs, but they are smaller and lighter colored. Unlike other bugs, bed bugs have no wings and cannot fly. The oval eggs are whitish, about 2.5 mm long and 0.5 mm in diameter.



Life cycle of the bed bug. Image: Bed Bug Foundation

Significance and habits

Bed bugs feed on the blood of humans and pets. They prefer to feed at night. The feeding process takes 3 to 15 minutes. The adult bugs suck blood every three to seven days. The bugs live in rooms where people sleep. During the day they hide in cracks on the bed frame and other furniture, on the mattress, behind covers, pictures, under wallpaper, in socks, etc.

Bed bugs spread slowly. An active spread from one dwelling to the next is possible, but only if there are a lot of bugs, if

the host is suddenly absent or if you try to fight them with insect sprays.



Adult bed bug feeding on blood. Photo: City of Zurich, Environmental and Health Protection

Development

Females lay up to 500 eggs during their lifetime. Bed bugs take around two months to fully mature under favorable conditions, but that time period may be shortened to four weeks with high temperatures (above 25°C) and frequent feeding opportunities. Adult bugs can withstand the cold for a longer period of time and fast for up to six months. They have a life expectancy of one year.

Damage

Most of the time you won't notice being bitten because it happens while you are sleep. They often bite several times while searching for capillaries in uncovered areas (neck, face, arms, ankles, etc.). Skin reactions from the injected saliva only occur after the bug has left the host/body, often even hours or days later. The itchy, swollen pustules can be troublesome for several days. In sensitive or allergic persons the bites can lead to large-scale skin inflammation. However, this is rare. Around 20 percent of the population shows no skin reactions after bed bug bites. To date, bed bugs are not known to transmit diseases.

Control

Bugs or their traces must be found before treatment can be started. Initiating treatment beforehand is unreliable. Insect sprays cannot eradicate an infestation – on the contrary,

they drive the bed bugs away, causing them to spread throughout the entire apartment or even the building. Bed bug control should always be left to professionals. Obtain several offers from professional pest control companies with a Swiss federal special permit. The clearly defined objective must be complete eradication. In most cases this requires multiple treatments. In addition to treatment with insecticides, thermal treatment – heating up the room or freezing objects – is also common. Silicate dust (diatomaceous earth) is a biological method with which companies can treat, for example, spaces such as cavities behind baseboards. These control methods are also used in combination, adapted to the specific situation. **Treatment does not protect against reintroduction.**

Prevention

Check used beds and furniture for bed bugs or traces of their droppings before you bring them into your home. Wash secondhand clothing at 60°C. Used moving boxes can also be infested with bed bugs. If your home is infested, don't dump furniture in the stairwell, cellar or attic – your neighbors may suddenly find themselves with bed bugs as well. **If you dispose of infested furniture, please mark it clearly as infested with bed bugs or make it unusable** so that others do not take the furniture and bugs home with them.

When arriving at a hotel room or holiday apartment, you can use a powerful flashlight to search the bed frame and slatted frame for any live bed bugs or traces of droppings.

How do you detect a bed bug infestation?

Bed bugs like to hide on mattresses, in the bed frame and in cracks close to the bed during the day. Indications of an infestation may include small black spots (see image with droppings in the adjacent column), traces of blood on the bed linen or itchy bites on the body. A good way to verify this is to search the apartment with sniffer dogs who are specially trained to find bed bugs. This can enable you to limit the infestation to individual rooms or objects, which can make treatment more efficient and cheaper. You can also use this method to confirm that no bed bugs are present.

What to do in case of bed bug infestation in a hotel room

Be sure to inform the hotel management. Let them give you another room, preferably not an adjacent one. Care should be taken with your suitcase and your own sleeping bag: bed bugs like to get into them, which aids in their spread. Place your suitcase as far away from the bed as possible and close all zippers. Take your sleeping bag home in a tightly sealed plastic bag and place it in a freezer for one week at -17°C.



Bed bug droppings on the slats of a heavily infested bed.
Photo: City of Zurich, Environmental and Health Protection

What to do after an overnight stay in a room with bed bugs

At home, unpack your luggage immediately outside (on a balcony). Laundry that cannot be washed immediately should be stored in waste bags tightly sealed with adhesive tape. The empty luggage should be immediately sprayed outdoors with a commercial insecticide spray and then aired well in the cellar or on the balcony. Infested textiles can be washed either at 60°C for 30 minutes or twice in a row at 40°C. Alternatively, you can treat them in a dryer at 45°C for 30 minutes or in a freezer at -17°C for several days.

Legal situation

Anyone who contracts with a company must also cover the costs. The property owner or management must rent the apartment in good condition, free of vermin (see also the Swiss Code of Obligations, in particular in accordance with tenancy law and the cantonal Ordinance on General and Residential Hygiene). If pests are present when moving into an apartment, this is considered to be a defect in the rented property. The landlord is responsible for remedying this defect. The costs cannot easily be passed on to tenants. Articles 256, 257f, g, h, 258 and 259 of the Code of Obligations regulate the legal situation in residential properties.

We can help you

Call us, or send or bring us the insects for identification. Our consultation is free of charge and only for residents of the City of Zurich. Telephone office hours are Monday to Friday, 1:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.

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