



Bed bugs In the UK – A Guide For Owners Of Self-Catering Accommodation

Current publicity from the media about bed bugs is causing concern in the self-catering accommodation sector. Property owners may be uncertain how to prevent bed bugs, what to do if they find bed bugs, or if they are notified of them by guests.

This is not a bed bug ‘crisis’ as such. Bed bugs have been around for millions of years but had virtually disappeared from developed countries by the 1950s. The last 30 years have seen a resurgence due to an increase in travel, a resistance to pesticides, and also owing to the growing popularity of second-hand furniture. Following lockdown, we have seen a further resurgence in reports of bed bugs, as national and international travel has returned to previous levels.

There is a false stigma around bed bugs. They are not an indicator of an unclean house and they do not spread disease. They are often just transferred from one property to another, via guest clothing or in luggage and via transport.

It’s important to learn what they look like and where they hide, and to have a clear policy in place to prevent them, and to eradicate them if you need to. If you find them in your property, or if a guest tells you they are present, you can swiftly take action to identify and eradicate them.

You need to:

PREVENT
IDENTIFY and
ERADICATE

WHAT ARE BED BUGS?

Bed bugs are small insects, usually *Cimex lectularius* in Western Europe and other temperate climates. They often live in furniture or bedding, and are parasitic on humans, but they are not known to spread diseases.

Bed bugs are visible to the human eye. They are oval in shape, about the size of a small apple pip, and are wingless with six legs. They are usually flat and brown but become red and engorged after they have been feeding (on human blood).

They are nocturnal and blood is all they feed on – so they bite.

They can live not only on beds and other upholstery, but also in crevices behind skirting boards, behind pictures, under wallpaper and in plug sockets. All they need to survive, and breed is a dark home and blood.



Adult bedbug



Adult bedbug

While there is no piece of legislation in the UK that specifically mentions bed bugs, there is some that gives local authorities powers to tackle 'verminous premises', such as the Public Health Act 1936. It is very rarely enforced in situations like these, but it is possible as bed bugs are considered a public health pest.

Should they be discovered in your property, it could result in complaints, bad reviews, loss of bookings and loss of loyal guests, so it makes sense to have a Best Practice Policy in place should you ever be confronted with a guest who thinks they have been bitten by bed bugs.

This could include advising guests to visit a pharmacist or GP for a clearer indication of what has bitten them. Obviously checking for signs of bed bugs in the rooms is always still recommended, but only a medical professional should be diagnosing any kind of bite/skin complaint.

PREVENTING BEDBUGS

Bed bugs are hitchhikers. They can travel to your property on guest clothes, in or on their luggage, inside sleeping bags, via secondhand furniture, and even in laptops and other personal belongings. Transport is key - guests can pick them up on public transport or can bring them from their own homes in their own vehicles.

It is difficult to prevent bed bugs from entering your property, but vigilance will help you to spot and deal with bed bugs before an infestation becomes serious.

It's worth checking regularly for the presence of bed bugs.

You could incorporate extra checks into your regular cleaning routine on changeover days, and keep records of this. Note the dates and exact locations of any evidence of bed bugs found. This may be helpful should guests claim they have been bitten.

- Vacuum thoroughly in rooms and areas around and underneath beds. This may get rid of some bed bugs or their eggs. Careful vacuuming should include rugs, floors, upholstered furniture, bed frames, under beds, around bed legs, sofa beds, and all cracks and crevices around the room. It is good practice to empty the vacuum bag regularly - place the used bag in a tightly sealed plastic bag and in an outside rubbish bin. Vacuuming will hinder an infestation, not eradicate it.
- Carefully check and clean the edges/seams of the mattress and headboard, including behind the headboard. Bed bugs can hide on or behind textile headboards, so you might consider replacing these with wood or metal. Regularly turn your mattresses to examine the underside.
- Heat is effective against bed bugs. Wash your accommodation laundry at high temperature (60 degrees) and heat-dry laundry to help to prevent the spread of bedbugs. Bed bugs die when their body temperature reaches 45-49C, so a washing cycle above 50C should eradicate the presence of bedbugs and larvae. Bed bugs and their eggs

can also hide in laundry containers or hampers, so these must be cleaned when you do the laundry.

- Bed bugs will not enjoy steam cleaning, as they are averse to higher temperatures. This will attack both bed bugs and eggs.

Other measures you can take to prevent infestations:

- Fit pest prevention covers on all mattresses and pillows. For mattresses, these are usually called zipped mattress encasements. Some examples:

Mattresses:

Mitre Linen:

https://www.mitrelinen.co.uk/bedroom/mattress-protectors/_/a33-2?text=mattress%20protector&cm_sp=Site%20Search-_-Redirect-_-mattress%20protector

Out of Eden:

<https://www.outofeden.co.uk/search/mattress%20encasement>

Other suppliers:

https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B099MZ4D26?ref_=cm_sw_r_apin_dp_G0Z217FT8N8Z0YNTKMP2&th=1

<https://www.bestpestcontrol.co.uk/bed-bug-mattress-covers-111-c.asp#:~:text=The%20Protect%2Da%2DBed%20mattress,blood%20and%20so%20they%20die.>

Pillows:

<https://www.pestcontroldirect.co.uk/shop/household-pests/bed-bugs/bed-bug-pillow-protector-covers/>

- Bed bugs can get into any gap you can slide a credit card into, so ensure that any cracks and crevices in rooms are completely sealed – for example, around skirting boards, plug sockets, around pipe entry points, or between floor and wall. You may wish to fit socket covers, so that bed bugs cannot hide in them or get in behind them. Bed bugs can also lodge behind picture frames and mirrors.
- Bed bugs can hide in clocks, radios, and other domestic items. Reducing clutter in your accommodation will reduce the available places for bed bugs to hide.
- Second-hand furniture: If bed bugs have not eaten for some time, you may not see signs of them on second-hand furniture you bring into your property. They can live for about a year without eating. You should therefore be cautious about bringing second-hand furniture into your accommodation.

- Once an infestation takes hold, bedbugs may move from one room to another, across the floor (probably at night). Very well-fitting doors and draft excluders fitted to the bottom of doors may prevent bed bugs moving easily to other rooms, but the original infestation site needs to be dealt with.

Bed bug traps

- Bed bug traps are sticky traps that will trap bugs and monitor bed bug activity in rooms. They can be used as an early indicator of infestation or to check for repeat infestations.
- There are products from a range of suppliers, for example:
 - <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Zero-Bed-Trap-Ready-Use/dp/B00IGE4JRM/>
 - <https://amzn.eu/d/gScpsQS>
 - <https://www.pestcontroldirect.co.uk/shop/household-pests/bed-bugs/bed-bug-slider-traps-pack-of-4/>

Zero In claims “The trap attracts and kills bed bugs during all stages of their development to help stop breeding cycles and reduce the population”, with traps having an effectiveness of around 60 days.

IDENTIFICATION

How To Identify Bed bugs - the insect

Bed bugs are insects visible to the human eye. Make sure you have identified the correct critter, and that the problem is not fleas, ticks, other insects, or spiders (some of which can bite).



An adult bedbug

There are around 90 species of bed bugs worldwide, but the most common species in the UK and other temperate climates is *Cimex lectularius*.

Typical bed bug characteristics -

Size - typical adult 4-7mm long. The size of a small apple pip

Colour - brown-red if not dormant. Clearer colour if dormant

Shape - oval shape, no distinct neck. Six legs

Motion - does not fly (mosquito) or jump (fleas). Crawls at the speed of an ant across surfaces

Habitat - prefer darker spaces. Unlikely to be seen moving in sunlight or daylight

Activity – Bed bugs are generally more active during the warmer months of the year but with the advance of domestic heating, they can thrive year-round. They thrive at temperatures of 21-32 C, but can survive as low as 0 degrees and as high as 49 C.

Bed bugs are mostly nocturnal, and seek shelter in dark places, so you may not spot them when cleaning if they are few in number. A torch can be handy if you are looking for them in their favoured places

Lifespan - 5-6 months normally, but can live longer than a year without feeding when dormant

Other evidence of bed bugs may include faeces or eggs:

Faeces – bed bug faeces are one of the best ways of identifying whether you have bed bugs or something else. These droppings appear as small reddish-brown spots or clusters that look like ink dots on bedding, the bed frame itself, upholstery, or the underside of the mattress. WikiHow has a good 10-step process:

Identifying bed bug faeces/droppings:

<https://www.wikihow.com/Identify-Bed-Bug-Droppings>

Eggs - Check mattress seams in particular for eggs. You may find light brown shed skins, and whitish-creamy coloured eggs or shells. These light-coloured eggs are the size of a pinhead,



Bedbug eggs, with two adults, in a dresser

so very difficult to spot - but they tend to be clustered, and attached to small, tight spaces such as mattress seams. A magnifying glass is useful. They hatch around 10-14 days after being laid.

Bed bug bites

These are often red spots or welts/wheals, typically appearing in rows or clusters, at least in the initial stages. They can appear on any parts of the body that are exposed during the night, though usually on necks, shoulders, backs, legs and arms.

Image of bed bug bites on human skin:

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bedbugb1.JPG#/media/File:Bedbugb1.JPG>

Mostly, we do not feel a bed bug bite when bitten, as the bed bug injects an anaesthetic first. Skin irritation tends to occur sometime later.

Some people don't react at all to bed bug bites, others have a faint pinkish-red mark, or stronger reactions may result in bigger red lumps or wheals. Bites clear up on their own within a week or two but can be irritating in which case keeping the affected areas clean and treating with a cool, damp cloth can help. In extreme cases, bites may become swollen or infected due to excessive scratching. Severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) is extremely rare, but not entirely impossible.

There are other conditions which produce symptoms similar to bed bug bites. These include scabies, mosquito bites, spider bites, flea bites, chicken pox, various avian mites (Gamasoidosis), urticaria, bacterial skin infections, and allergic reactions. Bites from other insects or spiders are often mistaken for bed bug bites. Ticks - very common in rural areas - also bite, but will generally remain attached to the bite area for some time, as they feed.

Life cycle of the bed bug

The life cycle typically takes 6-10 months, from eggs through several nymph stages to adult.

Dormancy – bed bugs can live for many months, but can also enter a dormant state, called diapause, when they do not feed owing to inhospitable environment. This could be for as long as a year. During this state, they do not have the characteristic red-brown feeding colour.

What to do if a guest thinks your property has bed bugs

Firstly, there's no need to panic, but you should take it seriously and act swiftly and responsibly.

You'll need to identify whether or not the culprit is *Cimex lectularius*. If your guests provide you with an image, you may decide to see whether the critter they report is a bed bug or a different insect - of the many mentioned above.

If you are clear these are indeed bed bugs, or if you are uncertain about the identification, the first line of action is to call a professional pest controller to come and undertake a thorough assessment to determine if bedbugs are present. This is imperative - if guests are convinced they have been bitten by bed bugs and put it out on social media or leave poor reviews, this could be damaging for your business.

Use a well-established pest control company accredited by the British Pest Control Association (BPCA), which has 700+ members nationally, and/or the National Pest Technicians Association (NPTA). They will carry out an inspection and provide you with a written report.

The BPCA have a Find a Pest Controller Tool on their website.

BPCA link: <https://bpca.org.uk/find>

If the pest control report confirms that bed bugs are NOT present, this should be explained to the guests, and the written evidence provided. Written evidence should include a professional assessment – it would be best to have an assessment that is independent, that you can present to guests.

If there is no evidence of bed bugs, according to a professional assessment, then guests need to be reassured that there are no bed bugs at the property and that any bites they have sustained must have been from another source – for example another insect, such as a mosquito, or a spider. Skin conditions such as rashes may be down to an allergy or similar

condition. You may wish to check whether any materials used at your premises are possible candidates for such reactions.

There are even bed bug Sniffer dogs who can detect bed bugs in properties.

<https://merlinenvironmental.co.uk/bed-bug-detection/>
<https://bedbughunters.co.uk/bed-bugs-sniffing-dogs/>
<https://www.terminix.com/blog/education/bed-bug-dogs/>
<https://www.jgpestcontrol.co.uk/london/bed-bug-sniffer-dogs>

You may decide that if there is a professional assessment that bed bugs are not present at your premises, guests will not be entitled to a refund on this basis. This should all be clear within your Terms & Conditions.

ERADICATION

What To Do If You Have Bed bugs

Your aim should be to ensure you discover bedbugs before your guests do. The first evidence of bed bugs at your property should not be a review on your website or on an OTA, or on social media post on Facebook or Instagram.

If your pest control assessment confirms the presence of bed bugs, you must act quickly.

Upon discovery, you should call in professional pest controllers. They can assess the level of the infestation, and the number of nests and eggs to determine how long the infestation has been there. But if you have a high turnover of guests, you will never know which guests brought bed bugs onto your premises.

The property should be vacated so that the insects can be eradicated and guests appropriately refunded. If they insist on staying, explain that they will not be entitled to a refund. Best practice would be to cancel Further guests until you are 100% sure there is no sign of bed bugs – this should be confirmed by pest control in writing.

Professional pest control technicians can treat entire rooms and properties, so this is the best option and the only one that we would recommend. They have extensive knowledge and access to treatments not available to the public.

Insecticides used by professionals, along with heat treatments like dry steam or hot air heat treatments, are the only effective response, as this will kill all stages of the bed bugs. This can be done in 24-48 hours.

It is unlikely that you will solve the problem yourself, and a DIY approach could make matters worse, such as spreading bed bugs to other areas.

Vacuuming will not get rid of a bed bug infestation, though it might remove the odd stray.

You do not need to take measures like throwing away mattresses; If a mattress is infested with bedbugs, it is unlikely that the infestation will be confined to the mattress.

You should avoid moving items between rooms while you have a bed bug problem, unless they are completely encased and sealed, as this can carry the pests to another location, exacerbating the problem.

You can send bedding to a professional laundry company, who will have processes that bedbugs cannot survive. (See below – How Professional Laundries Deal With Bed bugs). Any other fabrics should be washed at 60 degrees, tumble dried on a hot setting for at least 30 minutes, or dry cleaned. Alternatively, you can put them into a sealed bag in a deep freeze for at least 48 hours.

If you have strong proof that you do NOT have bed bugs - for example, from a professional pest control company - and that you have acted responsibly, you can make that evidence public if need be.

If you have had an infestation which has been professionally cleared, the pest control company will suggest monitoring measures to avoid a future re-infestation. These may include:

- Put sticky traps under the bed, especially at the head end – these release chemicals which lure bed bugs. Once they visit the trap they are adhered by a sticky substance and cannot escape. These will need to be checked and replaced regularly and can be bought online:
 - <https://amzn.eu/d/gScpsQS>
 - <https://www.pestcontroldirect.co.uk/shop/household-pests/bed-bugs/bed-bug-slider-traps-pack-of-4/>
- Steam cleaning these areas as an extra precaution, as the high temperature from the steam will kill almost any insect. There are several steam cleaners on the market, for example:
 - <https://amzn.eu/d/62o7qMW>
- Regular checks from a professional pest control technician so that you are provided with firm evidence that you do not have a problem with bed bugs.
- There are also companies that use sensing technology which acts as an early warning system by using real time monitoring – essentially, 24 hour bedbug monitoring. At the first sign of bed bugs they will alert you to the problem and it can then be efficiently dealt with. Spotta offer this service, though it can be costly - <https://www.spotta.co/>

Aftercare and monitoring is paramount after a bed bug infestation. Take heed of any advice given to you by your pest control professionals and make sure you have a very strict routine

in place as part of your regular cleaning programme. Well trained staff and clear recording of procedures can be a good line of defence to protect this from happening again.

Annexe: How professional laundries ensure there are no bed bugs

This information has kindly been supplied to us by **Domitex Laundry Solutions Ltd.**

Domitex processes linen to the highest standards when dealing with bed linen and textiles. We use a one way system from receipt of dirty laundry, through to the packing of freshly processed linen. Adhering to this lane methodology ensures no cross contamination throughout the process

We use market leading detergents and peroxides from Diversey Limited, a UK-based commercial & industrial chemical manufacturer covering healthcare, food & beverage, government and retail sectors.

In response to the bed bug infestation from Europe, which is now being seen in London and other parts of the country, we can assure our customers that our processing methods are robust and ensures that any infestation is eradicated from linen being processed.

The use of detergents and water is often enough to kill the bugs. However we maintain washing temperatures as a matter of good practice ensuring that they are dealt with.

The eradication of bed bugs is achieved by following the temperature guidelines as below:

Adults & Nymphs	45°C	15 Minutes
Eggs	45°C	60 Minutes
All Life Stages	46°C	7 Minutes

Domitex achieves full eradication through treating all bed linen and towels with a minimum temperature of 50°C for the minimum duration of 20 mins.

This very much exceeds the recommended guidelines. Our customers can be assured that our processing methods will eradicate any bugs, nymphs or eggs that received linen may contain however we advise customers to seek further advice should they suspect an infestation and deal with it immediately.

SOURCES AND REFERENCES

British Pest Control Association (BCPA) video about bed bugs - you will learn most of what you need in this 12-minute video:

<https://bpca.org.uk/a-z-of-pest-advice/bed-bugs-control-how-to-get-rid-of-bed-bugs-bpca-a-z-of-pests/189186>

BPCA: search for qualified technicians:

<https://bpca.org.uk/find>

National Pest Technician Association (NPTA): finding a technician (this search page may take a few seconds to load):

<https://www.npta.org.uk/member-search/>

NHS: health aspects of bed bugs:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/bedbugs/>

WikiHow - identifying bed bug faeces/droppings

<https://www.wikihow.com/Identify-Bed-Bug-Droppings>

Wikimedia Commons - images of bed bugs:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Cimex_lectularius

Spotta - new and interesting monitoring solutions: <https://www.spotta.co/>

Domitex Laundry - laundry treatments:

<https://domitexlaundry.co.uk/>

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