

# Auckland Regional Public Health Service

Rātonga Hauora ā Iwi o Tamaki Makaurau



Working with the people of Auckland, Counties Manukau and Waitemata

## Public Health Fact Sheet – Bed Bugs

### What are bed bugs?

Bed bugs are insects that, as adults, have oval-shaped bodies with no wings. Prior to feeding, they are about 4-7 mm long and flat. After feeding, they turn dark red and become bloated. Eggs are whitish, pear-shaped and about the size of a pinhead. Clusters of 10-50 eggs can be found in cracks and crevices. Bed bugs have a one-year life span, during which time a female can lay 200-400 eggs, depending on food supply and temperature. Eggs hatch in about 10 days.



### What do bed bugs feed on?

Bed bugs prefer to feed on human blood, but will also bite mammals and birds. Bed bugs bite at night, and will bite all over the human body, but especially around the face, neck, upper torso, arms and hands. Bed bugs can survive up to six months without feeding. Both male and female bed bugs bite.

### What do bed bug bites look like?

When bed bugs bite people, they inject their saliva into the biting area, causing the skin to become irritated and inflamed. Individual responses to bed bug bites will vary. The skin lesion from bed bug bites may go unnoticed, or be mistaken for flea or mosquito bites, or other skin conditions.



### Can I get sick from bed bugs?

There are no known cases of infectious disease directly transmitted by bed bug bites. Most people are not aware that they have been bitten, but some people are more sensitive to the bite and may have a localised reaction. Scratching the bitten areas can lead to infection.

### How do bed bugs get into my home?

Bed bugs are often carried into a home on objects such as furniture and clothing. If you think you have a bed bug problem, check for live bed bugs or shells in the following areas:

- Seams, creases and folds of mattresses and box springs
- Cracks in the bed frame and head board
- Under chairs, couches, beds and dust covers
- Between the cushions of couches and chairs
- Under rugs and the edges of carpets
- Between the folds of curtains
- In drawers
- Behind baseboards, and around window and door casings
- Behind electrical plates and under loose wallpaper, paintings and posters
- In cracks in plaster
- In telephones, radios, and clocks

Bed bugs can also travel from apartment to apartment along pipes, electrical wiring and other openings. If the infestation is heavy, a sweet smell may be noticed in the room.

### **How do I prevent bed bugs from entering my home?**

Although even the cleanest homes and hotels can have bed bugs, regular house cleaning, including vacuuming your mattress, can help to prevent an infestation.

Clean up clutter to help reduce the number of places bed bugs can hide.

Be careful when buying used furniture or clothes. Make sure to inspect the used item, and feel free to ask the retailer if the items were checked for bed bugs.

### **What can I do if I have bed bugs in my home?**

1. Inspect your mattress and bed frame, particularly the folds, crevices and the underside, and other locations where bed bugs like to hide.
2. Use a nozzle attachment on the vacuum to capture the bed bugs and their eggs. Vacuum all crevices on your mattress, bed frame, baseboards and any objects close to the bed. It is essential to vacuum daily, and empty the vacuum immediately whilst containing and destroying the contents (e.g. inside a sealed plastic bag into which fly spray has been squirted).
3. Wash all your linen in the hottest water possible, and place them in a hot dryer for 20 minutes. Consider covering your pillows and mattress with a plastic cover.
4. Remove all unnecessary clutter.
5. Use caulking to seal cracks and crevices between baseboards, on wood bed frames, floors and walls. Repair or remove peeling wallpaper, tighten loose light switch covers, and seal any openings where pipes, wires or other utilities come into your home (pay special attention to walls that are shared between apartments).
6. Monitor daily by setting out glue boards or sticky tape (carpet tape works well) to catch the bed bugs. Closely examine any items that you are bringing into your home.
7. If the above are not successful, consult a professional pest control service and discuss options that pose the least risk to humans and the environment.

If you choose to treat the infestation with an insecticide, use the least toxic product available and follow all manufacturers' instructions.

Whether you choose to follow the above steps or use insecticides, you may continue to see some live bed bugs for up to ten days. This is normal. If you continue to see a large number of bed bugs after two weeks, you may need to intensify your eradication efforts, or contact a professional pest control service.

### **How do I treat bed bug bites?**

Most bed bug bites go away by themselves and don't need treatment. Keep the skin clean and try not to scratch. If the bites are very itchy, your doctor may prescribe 1% hydrocortisone cream or antihistamines to relieve the itchiness. Oral antibiotics may be prescribed for any secondary skin infection.

### **Further information**

For more information on how to control bed bugs, please contact Auckland Regional Public Health Service on 09 623 4600 and ask for the duty Health Protection Officer in the Healthy Environments Team.