



Unwanted guests: the scourge of bed bugs

As the owner of a B&B, guest house, hotel or even a private home that you list on Air B&B, there can be little more damaging to your establishment's reputation than an accusation on TripAdvisor of bed bugs.

Tiny though they are, these blood-sucking insects have the ability to put off prospective guests for life. While bed bugs will just as happily stay at a clean hotel as a dirty one, there's something about these little horrors that screams "unhygienic" to guests.

Establishments can also face significant damages from guests demanding reimbursement for the infested luggage and clothing they've had to dispose of, or for pest control measures they've had to take to deal with the bed bugs brought home as a souvenir of their stay with you.

Here's what you need to know about bed bugs to ensure that if they ever check into your B&B, guest house or hotel, you can rapidly send them packing.

KNOW THY ENEMY

Bed bugs are small, flat, reddish-brown insects that grow to about 5 mm in length. Found everywhere from shops and offices to schools and even hospitals, bed bugs spread by stowing away in clothing, baggage and other belongings ... making every new guest a potential plague carrier.

Once through the door, bed bugs rapidly set up home in cracks and crevices. The seams of mattresses, bed bases, and behind headboards are favourite hiding places, allowing them to have close proximity to their human food.

If left to their own devices, bed bugs will put their hitch-hiking skills to good use to expand their territory, travelling from room to room with housekeeping.

From all these hiding places, they then head out on nocturnal raids with one target in mind: your guests. These little blood suckers feed exclusively on human blood, and they do it on the sly, at night when people are asleep and truly at their mercy. After feasting for several minutes, they crawl back to their hiding places, engorged and undetected.

SIGNS OF INVASION

The first sign you'll have that you're dealing with a bed bug infestation is usually when unhappy guests arrive at reception to complain about the itchy red welts on their exposed skin.

Since bed bugs aren't the only insects responsible for bites, don't raise the alarm until you've carried out a thorough inspection for more evidence.

Take a close look at the nooks and crannies around beds. Telltale signs of bed bugs, other than seeing the actual bugs themselves, are:

- blood spots on sheets and pillows;
- dark brown or black smears of bug excrement;
- little piles of droppings on hard surfaces;
- egg shells and shed skins; and
- a musty, unpleasant smell.

DECLARING WAR

A verdict of bed bugs does not mean you need to drag out all the beds and set fire to them. Here are 10 steps to take when declaring war on bed bugs.

1. Clean the bed bugs' hiding places. Wash bedding, curtains and clothing on the hottest wash possible, and dry them on high in the tumble dryer for at least 30 minutes.
2. Dry-scrub affected mattresses with a stiff brush, working into the seams to remove the bugs and their eggs.
3. Vacuum both the mattress and the carpet thoroughly. Discard the vacuum cleaner contents in a sealed bag in the rubbish.
4. Use steam cleaners, the type used to remove wrinkles from curtains, to kill bed bugs and their eggs on contact.
5. Check the base sets, lifting up the fabric cover to check that bugs are not living within the wooden frame.
6. Inspect the rest of the affected room thoroughly. Bed bugs have been known to set up home in and under bedside tables, in bedside lamps, under rugs, and in plug outlets. They may also have spread into the cupboards.
7. Encase mattresses in a bed bug cover, such as the Buglock Plus from Protect-a-Bed, to kill any bugs within the mattress and prevent future infestations. The Buglock Plus cover uses a patented three-sided zipper system to completely encase the mattress in an impenetrable barrier that ensures current bugs cannot leave the mattress to feed, and new bed bugs cannot enter the mattress to breed.

A mattress encasement cover should be left on for at least a year after an infestation to ensure any lingering insects are dead, since bed bugs can survive for several months without feeding.

8. Repair any cracks in the walls, fill gaps around skirting boards, and glue down any tears in wallpaper to minimise the places where bed bugs can hide.
9. Total eradication of bed bugs usually requires treatment with an insecticide. If going the DIY route, be sure to only use products which are made specifically for the extermination of bed bugs, or for use on bedding and mattresses. Always follow the safety instructions carefully.
10. If DIY measures don't do the trick, contact a pest control company to rid your establishment of the scourge.

To buy this product or view other products in the Protect-A-Bed range, please visit www.protectabed.co.za and click on the "Buy Now" button.

