



Bedbugs hitch-hike!





Bedbugs are found across the globe all year round.

They are primarily spread by tourism and commerce. They present themselves in private homes and especially in places where

lots of people come and go, such as hotels, hostels, public transport facilities and mountain huts. Although bedbugs are a source of disgust and leave behind bites, they do not transmit diseases.

1. How are bedbugs spread?

Bedbugs are predominantly spread through the transportation of infested objects. Hiking rucksacks are the main means by which hikers carry them between mountain huts and hotels before or after their hike. A single fertilised female in a rucksack can be enough to cause an infestation elsewhere (e.g. in a mountain hut or hotel, in a vehicle or at home).



2. What can you do to avoid spreading bedbugs?

You should always do everything you can to avoid spreading bedbugs or taking them home with you! Here are some things you can do to help:

- Store your rucksack in a firmly sealed bag whenever you are inside a mountain hut
- Always keep your rucksack closed when you are in the hut and keep it as far away as possible from your sleeping area (e.g. on a coat hook or on a chair)
- Make use of any preventative measures provided in the huts (rucksack storage facilities, sleeping bags provided by the hut, means of treating your sleeping bag, etc.)
- Keep worn items of clothing in a firmly sealed plastic bag to prevent human body scents from attracting bedbugs
- Search for bedbugs and traces of droppings in possible hiding places in your room before going to sleep (see point 3)
- If you find any bedbugs, inform the hut staff immediately and ask to be moved to another room if possible
- Before heading to your next destination, always check for any bedbugs and any other traces of them by shaking out and inspecting your rucksack and sleeping bag



- It is best to inspect your rucksack over the shower/bath or outside of the hut against a bright surface so that you can quickly spot bedbugs before they run away and find another hiding place
- If you find a possible bedbug, squash it. If you are not sure what it is, keep the insect (in a jar, zip bag or tissue) so that it can be identified later

Ask the hut staff about what preventative measures can be taken in the hut and about how you can help to avoid spreading bedbugs.

3. How can you spot a bedbug infestation?

It can be very difficult to spot bedbugs, especially when there are only a few of them. Use the following tips to help you detect whether there are bedbugs in a room:

- Look for bedbugs moving around (they are nocturnal so are rarely active during the day)
- Bedbugs mainly congregate together in hiding places
- Bedbugs could be hiding in any tiny cracks or crevices
- Favourite hiding places include (slatted) bed frames, furniture, in and behind photo frames, and behind light switches, plug sockets, skirting boards and cable ducts

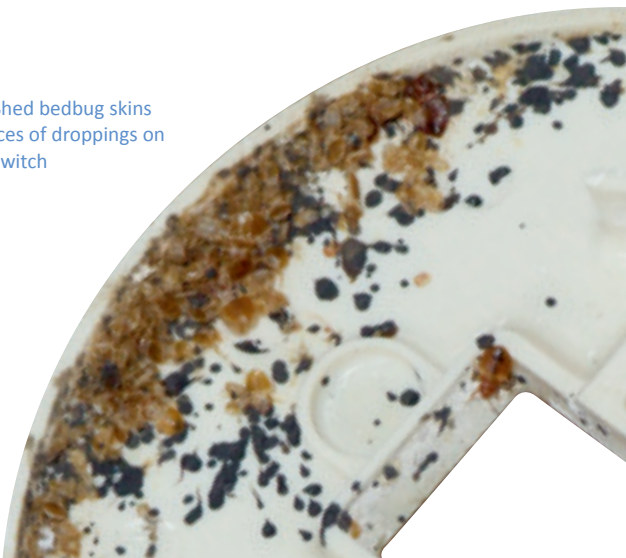


Fig. 1: Traces of bedbug droppings on a slatted bed frame

- In mountain huts, they can often be found behind wooden wall panelling (in knotholes and crevices)
- Bedbugs leave behind traces of droppings in the form of black dots at the entrances to their hiding places (see Figure 1)
- It may also be possible to spot their shed skins (see Figure 2) and eggs near their hiding places

Warning: traces of droppings could well be from a previous infestation – ask the hut staff!

Fig. 2: Shed bedbug skins and traces of droppings on a light switch



4. What is a bedbug and what are their habits?

Bedbugs or *Cimex lectularius* are insects that bite primarily humans in order to suck blood. They can be found in inhabited indoor spaces, regardless of how clean and hygienic the conditions. They do not transmit diseases.

Bedbugs do not have wings and their bodies are very flat. Adult bedbugs are reddish brown in colour. There are five juvenile stages, during which the immature bedbugs are yellowish brown. Bedbugs shed their skins five times before reaching maturity and require a meal of blood before each shedding. Depending on their stage of development, the insects reach a size of 1 to 8.5 millimetres (see diagram). They have a life expectancy of around six months. A female bedbug lays 150 to 300 eggs in the course of her lifetime. These milky white eggs are around 1 millimetre in length and have a slightly curved shape. The females 'glue' their eggs to a surface in or in the immediate vicinity of their hiding place. Bedbugs mainly leave their hiding places to suck blood at night. After feeding on blood, they return to their hiding places, which in the case of a mountain hut can mostly be found near to the hutkeepers' sleeping areas. Bedbugs can survive without blood for several months. To communicate with one another and when they are in danger (e.g. when they are crushed), they give off a scent that smells of bitter almonds. Some people find this smell very intense and unpleasant.

5. What do bedbug bites look like?



Fig. 3: Examples of bedbug bites

The way in which a person’s skin reacts to a bedbug bite can vary considerably from individual to individual (see Figure 3). Some people hardly react at all, whilst others develop itchy, red spots (ranging from just a couple of millimetres to a few centimetres in diameter) or blisters and welts. Certain people may also experience a delayed response to the bite (up to 10 days). This means it is sometimes difficult to work out where exactly you were bitten. Bedbug bites are usually arranged in a cluster or line, but may also appear on their own.

Skin reactions cannot be diagnosed as bedbug bites (not even by a dermatologist) and cannot be used as evidence of a bedbug infestation. This is because bites can also be caused by other insects, particularly during the summer months.

How to identify bedbugs

The diagram illustrates the life cycle of bedbugs. It features a ruler at the top for scale. On the left, five small bedbugs of increasing size are shown, labeled 'Juvenile stages 1-5 (from left to right)'. On the right, two larger bedbugs are shown, labeled 'Adult stage Male (left) + female (right)'. A vertical scale bar next to the adult bedbugs indicates a length of 4.8 mm.



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