

Don't Let The Bed Bugs Bite and Conquer your Territories

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Have you ever felt an itchy or burning sensation during the night and woke up to tiny reddish swellings on your skin in the morning? If yes, you might have been sleeping with these tiny insects called bed bugs, which are considered pests. These small, flat, brownish insects are [obligate hematophagous](#) insects — blood is their only food source to complete their growth development and reproduction. They are a part of the [Cimicidae](#) family, which have around 100 known species. Luckily, only three species are known to love feeding on human blood: The tropical bed bug ([Cimex hemipterus](#)), the common bed bug ([Cimex lectularius](#)), and the West African bat bug (*Leptocimex boueti*).

Among these three tiny blood-suckers, Malaysia's most highly distributed species is the tropical bed bug. Bed bugs love to hide in dark places such as mattresses, under or in cracks and crevices on the walls and furniture, making them undetectable. These insects will begin their blood-hunting primarily at night, appearing from their hiding place and crawling onto their sleeping host. They can detect the presence of a host by the host's body odour and vibrations. Their feast takes around 30 minutes, and they will return to their hiding place immediately.

It is speculated that the resurgence of bed bugs in Malaysia started due to the inflow of migrant workers from less developed countries such as Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and Myanmar during the last 20 years. Many bed bug infestation cases were recorded in worker dormitories and maids' rooms in Malaysia. Secondly, local and foreign tourists that travel worldwide can also bring bed bugs. Bed bugs may cling to their luggage and travel to many different places to multiply. The third factor contributing to the resurgence of bed bugs is using second-hand furniture that is not taken care of.

Bed bugs love to hide in furniture, especially those barely used. In addition, exterminators lack understanding of how to deal with bed bugs. Some are unaware of the nature of different pests and how to handle them properly. Thus, licensed exterminators should execute proper extermination to prevent remaining bed bugs that will rapidly increase in numbers again.

In Malaysia, cases involving bed bug infestation are still under control as exterminators receive minimal customer complaints. This is due to the lack of bed bugs morphological knowledge among the society. Some are unaware that they are sharing a roof with bed bugs; some believe bed bugs are not a major problem in their lives, allowing bed bugs to multiply. It is important

to note that the standard pricing for one-bed bug treatment will cost approximately RM500 – RM1,000, depending on the degree of infestation. Because of the high cost of treatment, residents prefer to handle the bed bugs themselves rather than call the exterminators.

Their bites can be very itchy and may become serious for people with sensitive skin. Bed bugs have a needle-like stylet that can penetrate the host's exposed skin until reaching the blood vessels and secrete saliva with proteins that cause dermatological effects. The severity level of the effects can vary depending on the host's sensibility. Their bites typically cause itchy and stinging skin lesions that resolve within 1-2 weeks. However, people with allergies can be badly impacted by its bites. They may develop secondary infections such as impetigo, ecthyma, and lymphangitis. In severe cases, a patient's body can go into anaphylactic shock that requires immediate treatment, as it can bring fatality in less than 15 minutes!

Furthermore, people living with bed bugs have been experiencing sleep deprivation, insomnia, or sleeplessness. The bite of bed bugs can disturb our sleeping pattern as they are very itchy, making it harder to fall asleep and constantly waking up at night. Studies also claim that some people with infested homes feel ashamed about their house and worry too much about getting bitten, which can lead to psychological effects, such as delusional parasitosis, anxiety, and phobias.

Bed bug issues are not commonly discussed among Malaysians, and few are aware of the presence of bed bugs. Therefore, campaigns should be organised to spread awareness about bed bugs among residents so they can learn to identify, manage, and prevent them. Many ways can be implemented to prevent it from being infested. For instance, sealing cracks and crevices to minimise bed bugs hiding places, checking signs of infestation in hotel rooms, inspecting belongings while travelling, and regularly inspecting furniture.

If there are signs of infestation, move and seal infested items in plastic bags to treat them safely. Consider using non-chemical treatment when treating bed bugs on your own, as it is safer than chemicals. There are three types of non-chemical treatment: expose bed bugs to high heat (heat treatment), place infested items in the freezer and set them to 0°C (cold treatment), and use hot steam cleaner to kill bed bugs in cracks and crevices. However, it is encouraged to let exterminators handle it to exterminate them completely. Lastly, further inspection of the house after treatment is needed in case bed bug eggs remain. Hopefully, in these ways, we can change the minds of Malaysians and outnumber the bed bug population for a better life.