

## Bedbug epidemic that's turning Great Britain into Great Bitten

**AN EPIDEMIC** of bedbugs is sweeping the nation, fuelled by air travel and warmer summers.

Infestations have soared 500 per cent in the last two years, according to pest control experts.

Cities such as London and Manchester have taken the brunt of the epidemic because of the large number of people on the move every day.

Experts believe the huge expansion in air travel, coupled with global warming, has brought millions of bedbugs into the country on travellers' clothes and in their suitcases.

Bedbugs are red and brown in colour and are about the same size as an apple pip. They feed on human blood by piercing the

By **Arthur Martin**

skin, sucking up four times their own body weight in 15 minutes.

The insects, whose bites cause itching, were virtually eradicated in the 1950s. But now pest control companies are reporting a surge in the number of calls from homes with infestations.

David Cain, who runs a decontamination company, said: 'I've had 500 per cent more calls this year reporting outbreaks than last.

Many people think the spread of bedbugs is caused by bad hygiene - but that's a common misconception. Dirty houses will make infestations harder to remove, but they are actually spread by many of the richer people in society because they travel more. They are spread on public transport because people

sit very close to each other. People need to be cautious and avoid sitting down.'

He added: 'If people's homes are badly hit, they'll carry bedbugs on their clothes. If they sit on public transport, they'll leave the bugs behind when they get up and the next person will get a dose. I'm often called out to people with more than 150 bites.'

Bedbugs are very hard to spot because they hide in mattresses or in cracks in flooring or walls and come out to feed between 1am and 5am. Experts advise vacuuming mattresses and cleaning regularly to keep them at bay.

Kevin Higgins, of the British Pest Control Association, said: 'We need to get this under control. The bedbug population is spiralling.'