



# Food safety advice

## PSOCIDS

From time to time people find that their food cupboards have become infested with tiny insects, these may be grey, brown or black. They are often found on or inside the packaging of dry goods such as flour, milk powder, sugar or cereal. You may naturally assume that the products themselves are at fault however it is much more likely that the insects have come from your own cupboards at home.



The aim of this leaflet is to explain what these insects are and how best to prevent them.

### What are Psocids?

Psocids – or booklice – are common but harmless insects between 1 and 2mm long, which can survive in dry powdery foods. They are not caused by poor hygiene, and are just as common in the cleanest of homes. They dislike light and disturbance and prefer to live in dark, warm, humid places – such as the folds of packaging in food cupboards. They feed on a wide variety of dry food products - such as flour - and also the microscopic moulds that develop in humid conditions. They may live for about 6 months during which time the female may lay up to 100 eggs. Our research has shown that psocids found in the home are rarely found where food is produced.

### Appearance



Adults — Size varies according to species. Generally 1–2 mm long. Pale yellow–brown to dark brown in colour.

Nymphs — very small, often appear transparent. No larval stages.

### What causes them?

They prefer areas with high humidity but can tolerate dry conditions for some days. The kitchen is likely to provide the conditions they need and food cupboards provide darkness, which attracts them. Some food products, including flour, naturally contain some moisture; moisture in the home can be caused by not having enough ventilation in the kitchen or bathroom. In warm conditions they can rapidly increase in number. This is most likely to occur during the summer months when temperatures are higher.



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## Prevention

It is best to keep all dry foods in cool larders or cupboards with ventilation. If this is not possible, make sure that your cupboards are free from condensation and damp. If you notice that condensation occurs in your kitchen, particularly during cooking or washing, open your windows.



If you discover any insects in your home, do not use an insecticide because of the danger of contaminating your food. The best method of getting rid of them is to remove and dispose of all contaminated foods. Thoroughly clean and dry the affected cupboard(s) paying attention to ensure that you have cleaned all the nooks and crannies where they may try and hide. Make sure the cupboard is completely dry before replacing any foods.

## To prevent Psocids remember these key points:

1. Keep the kitchen and food storage cupboards clean, well ventilated and dry
2. Check food cupboards regularly, using the contents in best before date order.
3. Store vulnerable foods like flour in washable, lidded containers.
4. Check food packaging before purchase to ensure it is undamaged.
5. Check the food on opening to ensure it is not infested with insects.