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FAQ about Bedbugs: Pesticide bans have led to the dreaded pest



An adult bedbug.

Ashley Csanady August 7, 2010 – 11:37 am

It would be best not to panic, but we stand on the threshold of a global pandemic released last week by the National Pest Management Association and the University of California, Berkeley. Bedbugs, the tiny bloodsucking insects that have struck fear in the hearts of any sleep. “They are everywhere,” agrees Cathy Loik, specialist for the Toronto Bed Bug Society.

Toronto Public Health. “Dirty or clean, you can get them. Rich or poor, you can get rid of them? The *Post*’s Ashley Csanady looks for the answers.

First things first How widespread is Toronto’s infestation? New York announced last week a campaign to rid the Big Apple of its bugs, but Toronto already spends the same annual amount on pest control at hospitals, libraries, condos, apartments and single-family homes across the city. A bedbug re-publicize addresses that have reported the pests. “People are so freaked out. People find a bug and it’s the worst,” said Michael Goldman, a certified entomologist with Purity Pest Control. “Just because you see one doesn’t mean it’s a bed bug.” That said, the problem has spread so quickly over the past decade that :

Why are they spreading? Bed bugs had been largely dormant in North America since the 1950s, but over the past decade they have made a resurgence. Some experts blame an increase in international travel and Eastern Europe, where extensive infestations occurred during the Soviet era. But Dr. Michael Goldman at the University of Kentucky, points a finger at change to insecticide regulations. “What made bed bugs so successful decades ago was the availability of very effective, long-lasting insecticides that were cheap, affordable and available to control companies but not to consumers over the counter,” he said. He recently conducted a study of insecticides used today. He found insecticides in two families, organophosphites and carbamates, are especially common. Although some of these compounds can be found in insect traps or spot treatments, most are not used by control professionals in North America, according to Mr. Goldman. This is particularly worrisome because they have no effect on bedbug eggs, he says.

Where are they, and have you asked Rover? One of the reasons bedbugs are so hard to find is they hide in — couches, walls, even bookcases. So a few years ago, Mr. Goldman trained his dog Kody to sniff out bedbugs — to how police dogs are trained to sniff for bombs or drugs. He now has three dogs trained to sniff out bedbugs, used by many extermination companies to pinpoint nests, and were even used to clear hotel rooms before last month’s G20 summit. Increasingly, people use Mr. Goldman’s dogs to sniff out infestations before they start on a long-term lease. “If it’s a heavy infestation it’s a no-brainer,” Mr. Goldman said, but “if it’s a light infestation of bedbugs, it’s very difficult to find,” unless you’re a dog. The human eye can detect bedbugs with a success rate of scores 95%.

How can you ever sleep tight again? Bedbugs are considered the hardest pest to exterminate because their life cycle is crucial. From there, Mr. Goldman uses a combination of vacuuming, steam-cleaning and pesticides. He will not use some of the insecticides that have been proven effective. “If we had those [pesticides] today, it would be a lot easier we’re having now.” And the problem might be getting worse: Mr. Goldman says bedbugs are becoming resistant to insecticides he is allowed to use. The new methods entering the market are too time-intensive for most homeowners.

What’s the temperature? Bedbugs don’t like extremes. Temperatures over 60C will wipe them out, but it’s a bit more tricky. Just throwing a contaminated mattress outside in January won’t suffice, as they can survive in which allows them a chance to slide into a state of hibernation. You have to freeze them instantly. Cryogenic extermination method that does just that. It takes carbon dioxide gas and turns it into a solid, which is a cold gas-like substance that can be used like a steam-cleaner to freeze bed bugs in their tracks. Cryogenic steam treatments are a stand-alone treatment. They don’t have any residual or lasting effects. “Volumetric heating [...] that’s a little different because now you’re truly radiating heat to every corner of the room to hide.” With this method, exterminators raise the interior temperature of an infected area to 135F. Some medications and the like can’t take the heat, but even most household electronics can handle it. Cryogenic is effective and chemical-free. The catch? It’s very expensive and time consuming. The best method is still being argued.

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