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# Some Utahns not sleeping tight

Pest-control companies try to keep bloodsuckers from making themselves at home

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OGDEN — Some people in the Top of Utah are taking the old phrase “Don’t let the bedbugs bite” quite literally these days, as the pests that have been almost nonexistent in the United States over the past several decades are making a comeback.

“It was rare to see bedbugs in the U.S. 20 or even 10 years ago,” said Frank Carlsen, an environmental health scientist at the Weber-Morgan Health Department.

“They’ve come back with a vengeance.”

Since 2001, the nation has seen a 71 percent increase in bedbug infestations, according to the National Pest Management Association.

Health officials cite a number of reasons for the return of the blood-sucking bugs, most notably an increase in international travel.

Bedbugs are about the size of an apple seed and are flat. They easily attach to clothes, get into luggage and can be spread fairly easily, Carlsen said.

“We recently had someone come back from California who had been getting bitten during her trip,” he said.

“When she came back, she was getting bites in her apartment a few weeks later.” Carlsen said that, last year, the department received nine calls from renters and motel officials reporting bedbugs. So far in 2009, four calls have been made to the department.

Other cases exist, he said, but many instances don’t get reported, as the department has authority only over rentals and hotels, not private residences.

The bugs have always thrived in many Third World countries, but were rare in North America and Western Europe after the second half of the 20th century, according to the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

That changed about five years ago. Bedbugs began showing up in hotels and homes on the East Coast and have since spread across the country, said Tracy Teeples, president of Clearfieldbased Beeline Pest Control.

“The problem hit Utah about 2 1/2 years ago,” Teeples said. “Before that, we had practically no calls for bedbugs.”

In recent months, Beeline has averaged five calls a day just for bedbugs.

“It seems to be getting worse,” Teeples said.

Bedbugs feed off human blood. The pests live in mattresses, box springs and sometimes behind headboards and in crevices. The bugs stay hidden during the day, and people often don’t know they have a bedbug problem until they are bitten in the middle of the night.

Bites can cause scarring, swelling and rashes, but there has been no scientific evidence the bugs can transmit any disease to the victim, Carlsen said.

A female bedbug can lay at least 200 eggs during its life span.

"Infestation can get worse fairly quickly," Carlsen said.

"It can be quite difficult to get rid of them. They don't respond to baits, like a cockroach would, and they don't regularly come out until nighttime to feed."

The Environmental Protection Agency held a National Bed Bug Summit in Washington, D.C., this week to discuss the growing problem of bedbugs in the U.S., including prevention and control, as well as how to educate the public about the problem.

Because the bugs have been virtually nonexistent in the U.S. for decades, pestcontrol companies and the government must find new ways to attack the problem.

Teeples said pesticides that are currently used to wipe out the bugs work well, but are outdated.

Bedbugs were once treated with the chemical DDT, which is now outlawed in the U.S. But even countries that still use DDT are finding the bugs are becoming resistant to the pesticide.

Teeples said he expects more effective pest-control treatments to emerge in the next few years as the problem grows.

Fumigation sessions are usually spread out and done on a biweekly basis to attack the areas where the bugs are known to lay eggs. A growth inhibitor is used to wipe out the eggs, and a number of treatments are necessary to keep the bug population from spreading, Teeples said.

Carlsen said renters should notify the Weber-Morgan Health Department if they think they may have bedbugs, and he strongly recommends both renters and homeowners alike contact a pest-control company to fight the bugs.

"(The bugs) can irritate and torment people," he said.

"They will stay near the bed where they can feed on the host. It's frustrating."

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