

Bedbugs rearing their ugly heads again

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The bedbug, a blood-sucking parasite, is making a comeback, first in France and now in the United Kingdom.

There were also reports from South Korea. Some blamed them on foreign exchange students over the summer vacation. In Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, at least 50 instances have lately been documented.

Bedbugs, along with rats, flies and mosquitoes, were once considered one of the four pests worthy of a concerted effort to eradicate them in China. Bedbugs appeared to be a borderline situation because, when the four pests were first mentioned in 1958, they also included sparrows, which were replaced in 1960 by bedbugs on the advice of some biologists.

By the end of the 1980s, the programs had been so successful that bedbugs had been nearly eradicated in nearly all of China.

Unlike the other three pests, which are easily identified, bedbugs' presence is usually acknowledged in hindsight after they have done their job. It is nocturnal, typically lurking in mattresses or spring beds at night, and feeds on human blood. Individual reactions to bedbug bites vary, but most people describe rashes, itches and then scratching.

Their current global movement is being blamed on their hosts' clothes and bags, where they conceal themselves.

And they travel fast.

When the bedbug issue initially broke out in France in late August and early September, nearly 20 schools were forced to close temporarily.

According to a French health professional, discovering bedbugs in your area or house is a nightmarish experience. A government survey in France found that about 11 percent

of families are dealing with bedbugs, which are responsible for insomnia, psychosis and absenteeism from work or school.

The United Kingdom, which has held regular communications with France, appeared to be the next to be affected.

On October 16, the BBC reported the discovery of bedbugs in a variety of public areas in France and the United Kingdom, including hotels, subways, cinemas and hospitals. A pest treatment company in the United Kingdom reported a 65 percent increase in business during the second quarter of this year.

By November 6, around 30 cases had been reported to the authorities in South Korea. Some blamed them on international exchange students who were attending a university over the summer vacation.

Bedbugs have instilled such terror in some South Koreans that they avoid subway seats or going to the movies to reduce their chances of encountering bedbugs.

The fear is not unfounded. According to a professor at Eulji University in South Korea, bedbugs can spread so quickly that it is difficult to eradicate them in a short period of time.

Around 50 cases have been reported in Hong Kong, with a number of residents reporting bedbug traces on their mattresses and sofas.

South Korea is a popular tourist destination for Hong Kong residents, and it was thought that these visitors may have smuggled in bedbugs hidden in the rollers of their baggage.

Bedbugs attack in swarms. While a person may be bitten by three or four mosquitoes at the same time, the number of bedbugs working at a host at one time may be 30 or 50, resulting in severe itching, scratches or even illnesses.

Bedbugs are known as



Metro operators disinfect train seats in Gwangju, South Korea, to prevent the spread of bedbugs. — Imaginechina



A bedbug is seen on a glove of a biocide technician from the company Hygiene Premium who treats an apartment against bedbugs in L'Hay-les-Roses, near Paris, France. — Reuters



Skin rashes after bedbug bites

chouchong (stinking bugs) in China because they leave behind an offensive smell that was believed to be defensive and aphrodisiac.

They also breed quickly. A bedbug usually goes through three stages: egg, nymph and adulthood. With the bugs ready for mating two or three days after eclosion, it's no wonder that they can breed three to four generations in the temperate zone and five to six generations in the tropics.

There is no need to panic.

Although the Hepatitis-B virus and a number of antibiotic-resistant bacteria have been found in bedbugs, there is no evidence that bedbugs are carriers of viruses or bacteria, so the chances of contracting a disease from bites are much lower than with other pests, particularly cockroaches, which do carry viruses or bacteria.

In the event of bedbug bites, rinse with soap or sodium

bicarbonate, use toilet water to relieve itching, and use erythromycin in the event of festering. Antiseptics can be given orally in extreme cases of infection, but if you have a history of allergies, go to the hospital.

Clean your home on a regular basis, avoid using used furniture, spray disinfectants on your luggage before entering your home, and sanitize your garments with hot steam or hot water.