

## **Bedbugs Found Carrying Drug-Resistant Staph**

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August 1, 2011

Some bedbugs have begun carrying a deadly staph virus, researchers report, bringing a dangerous new twist to the resurgence of bedbug infestations since the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency outlawed the effective pesticide DDT 40 years ago.

The nation's bedbug population, which was almost completely wiped in the United States through the use of DDT, has grown particularly rapidly during the past 10 years. Infestations have overwhelmed schools, hospitals, apartment buildings, and hotels, particularly in large cities.

### **Dangerous Development**

Adding a new and dangerous twist to the bedbug resurgences, Canadian researchers have discovered bedbugs carrying methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) and vancomycin-resistant *Enterococcus faecium* (VRE). MRSA is a bacterial infection that is highly resistant to some antibiotics and can become deadly if the infection gets through the skin and into the bloodstream. VRE is a less dangerous form of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

Marc Romney, one of the study's authors and a medical microbiologist at St. Paul's Hospital, an inner-city hospital in Vancouver, noticed a rise in bedbugs and of cases of MRSA.

To check the connection, the two researchers collected five bedbugs from patients, then crushed and analyzed them. The researchers found MRSA on three of them and VRE on the other two.

### **Groups at Heightened Risk**

According to Jeffrey White, a research entomologist for Cooper Pest Solutions and BedBug Central, people in apartment buildings and group home settings are especially vulnerable to bedbugs.

"Where this is a problem is going to be the group home type setting. When that many people are living that close together, it's easy for the bedbugs to walk from person to person," White said.

Education is very important in the renewed battle against bedbugs, said White.

"Quite frankly, bedbugs had been eradicated in North America for between 50 and 60 years, and most people haven't ever seen one or even know what they look like. If people have questions

about bedbugs, they can go to our Website, <http://www.bedbugcentral.com/>, or others where they will find information similar to a cold and flu fact sheet” White advised.

“I think in the future this problem could explode in certain communities. Treatment costs between \$800 and \$1,000, and when you’re in a lower socioeconomic group struggling to pay your rent and put food on the table, you can see how people might have a problem affording treatment and neglecting it,” said White.

### **Consequence of DDT Ban**

The bedbug resurgence is a foreseeable result of poor policy decisions, said H. Sterling Burnett, a senior fellow with the National Center for Policy Analysis.

“Bedbugs are not limited to certain places. You don’t have to have a dirty house, but clutter helps hide them. Most households have never seen a bedbug before now. But in the early ’70s, the government banned the pesticide DDT, and now we’re seeing bedbug infestations in European and North American cities. This is another legacy of Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring, the 1962 book credited with starting the environmental movement, leading to the ban of DDT in the early ’70s,” said Burnett.

“Boll weevils, mosquitoes, and bedbugs were pretty much wiped out in the ’40s and ’50s. Back then, you never heard of someone contracting malaria unless they had gone abroad. By banning DDT, we’ve killed people in developed countries through the spread of malaria; now we’re subjecting the U.S. population to bedbugs and other pests and vermin,” said Burnett.

“Government should lift the ban on DDT and other pesticides that are effective in treating pests like bedbugs,” says Burnett.

Angela Logomasini, director of risk and environmental policy with the Competitive Enterprise Institute, agrees the federal government should lift the ban on DDT.

“There’s some controversy regarding the ban on DDT. We had eradicated bedbugs in the past, then we banned DDT for home use, and now they’re back. I think this policy needs to be reevaluated because why should we remove an effective weapon from our arsenal?” asked Logomasini.

“Also, we need a better regulatory environment. Rather than removing products from the shelves, which is where we are today because of the precautionary principle, more evaluation and experimentation is needed,” Logomasini suggested.