



STAFF REPORT INFORMATION ONLY

Toronto Bed Bug Project – 2010 Update

Date:	November 5, 2010
To:	Toronto Board of Health
From:	Medical Officer of Health
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

On November 16, 2009, the Toronto Board of Health recommended that the Province provide targeted funding for bed bug control initiatives for low income and vulnerable populations. In addition, the Board also recommended that the City Manager recognize bed bug control as a City-wide issue that required the appointment of a project coordinator and the participation of all Divisions, Agencies and key community partners.

This report provides an update on these recommendations and highlights the Toronto Bed Bug Project's achievements for 2010.

As with other major cities in North America, Toronto continues to experience an increased level of bed bug infestations and the most vulnerable populations in Toronto continue to be the most seriously impacted by these infestations.

Divisions within the City and community agencies in Toronto have responded to this re-emerging pest by developing partnerships, maximizing existing programs, and diverting resources from other funded programs.

While this approach has provided important assistance to populations in need, given the volume of requests received and the resources currently available to support this effort, it is unsustainable at the intensity that may be required over the long term.

In order to adequately respond on a prolonged and intensive basis to what is proving to be a persistent and recurring issue, specific targeted support for bed bug control initiatives is required.

While the Province of Ontario has recently shown increasing willingness to engage on the bed bug issue more generally, to date the specific financial assistance requested by the City of Toronto has yet to be provided.

Financial Impact

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

DECISION HISTORY

In February 2008, the Board of Health requested the Medical Officer of Health to establish an Action Committee of city divisions, housing providers, health care organizations, social services, community groups, representatives of landlords and tenants and other appropriate stakeholders. The Action Committee was tasked with developing a comprehensive action plan to reduce bed bug infestations in the City of Toronto with particular emphasis on vulnerable populations.

In response to this request, a Bed Bug Forum was held in March, 2008 and was attended by representatives of the above-mentioned stakeholders. This forum led to the establishment of The Toronto Bed Bug Project (TBBP) which focussed on pulling together all existing bed bug control initiatives and expertise, the creation of partnerships and the development of action plans to achieve maximum effect without additional dedicated funding.

In November 2009, TBBP reported to the Board of Health providing an update on bed bug control initiatives and underscoring the extent of the bed bug problem and the ongoing support required to sustain the initiative.

The Board of Health subsequently recommended that the Government of Ontario provide targeted funding for bed bug control initiatives for vulnerable populations as part of their poverty reduction strategy. In addition, the Board also requested the City Manager to recognize bed bug control as a City-wide program and to appoint a City-wide project manager to lead this initiative. The Board of Health also recommended that an annual report be provided in 2010 by the Toronto Bed Bug Project.

This report outlines progress on these recommendations and highlights the achievements of the Toronto Bed Bug Project in 2010.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

As the Board has previously been advised, jurisdictions across North America have over the past ten years noticed an increase in bed bug infestations in both residential and non-residential settings.

While the reasons for this increase in bed bug infestations are not fully understood, a number of theories have been put forward by experts in the pest control field. These include; the resilience of bed bugs and their ability to develop resistance to chemical pesticides; the general move away from the use of powerful, broad spectrum residual

pesticides for other residential pests such as cockroaches; and the increase in international travel.

While bed bugs do not spread infectious diseases, people struggling with infestations are often left to deal with the stigma associated with such infestations and in many cases, with resulting family and community isolation.

There is no simple "quick fix" to a bed bug infestation and the most effective control program for dealing with bed bugs is one that utilizes integrated pest management (IPM). This is an approach in which non-chemical techniques (decluttering, steam cleaning, sealing cracks and crevices, etc) are used in combination with pesticide usage in a manner which minimizes the risk of human chemical exposure.

Although bed bugs can arise in different settings, vulnerable populations continue to be the most severely impacted. While significant City efforts have been made to provide assistance to this sector of the community, the numbers, severity of the cases, and the labour intensive case management required, continue to make this a challenging task. In addition, as awareness of the bed bug issue has increased through the media and through the visibility of the Toronto Bed Bug Project – so too has the frequency of requests for assistance.

COMMENTS

The TBBP has proceeded to build on the gains made in 2009 through the development of partnerships and the adoption of best practices. A number of the achievements and successes are highlighted below.

Bed Bugs – A City-Wide Issue

In a direct response to the recommendation from the Board of Health that the City Manager recognize bed bug controls as a City-wide issue requiring the appointment of a project coordinator and the participation of all Divisions, in 2010, the coordination of City-wide efforts to deal with bed bugs was moved from Toronto Public Health (TPH) to the office of the Deputy City Manager (Cluster A).

In addition to the above, the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) and the Director Hostel Services (SSHA) have taken on lead roles in coordinating City-wide bed bug control initiatives and the Director of Hostel Services will be assuming the co-chairmanship of the TBBP

With a greater emphasis being placed on more effective inter-divisional cooperation, many of the achievements highlighted in this report reflect a more effective City-wide approach.

Under the new City-wide approach two key activities in 2010 are noted below:

1. Provincial Funding for Longer Term Strategies

Under the direction of the Deputy City Manager, in June 2010, the City of Toronto entered into discussions with the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (MOHLTC) with a view to developing a sustainable funding partnership for the control of bed bugs.

A business case was provided in support of a request for assistance to MOHLTC for funding for a five-year program in the amount of \$2,893,778 annually. The funds requested were intended to build on existing Toronto efforts to establish an effective, integrated and sustainable city-wide program that identifies bed bug infestations, provides extreme cleaning and unit preparation, intensive case management and follow up supports, conducts education and outreach events, documents occurrences and monitors outcomes.

This funding request included funds to hire a project manager to coordinate city-wide bed bug control efforts; the hiring of six Public Health Inspectors to increase inspection capacity; the hiring of three Public Health Nurses and five Toronto Employment and Social Services (TESS) Case Workers to increase case management capacity; the expansion of the Bug and Scrub program to ensure increased extreme cleaning assistance for vulnerable clients; hiring a dedicated bed bug educator/trainer to meet growing demands for public training and education and the hiring of a Research Analyst to monitor the effectiveness of bed bug control strategies.

While the initial response to the above request has not as yet been positive, the Province has responded to the city-initiated discussion by announcing a number of bed bug initiatives.

MOHLTC has undertaken an initial province-wide survey of all Health Units to determine the extent of concern about bed bugs and the level of response from Public Health Units, and has also committed to developing a province-wide bed bug monitoring tool.

MOHLTC is in the process of developing a public education and outreach program based on materials developed by TPH.

The City will continue to advocate for the development of a multi-jurisdictional partnership with the Province in line with the service delivery at the local level.

2. The Bed Bug Summit

In an attempt to create greater Provincial Government awareness of the bed bug issue, a bed bug summit, organized by MPP Mike Colle, was held on September 29, 2010. Attendees at the event heard presentations from the pest control industry, landlord groups, the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, local governments and community agencies.

The City of Toronto was represented at this event by the Director Hostel Services (SSHA) who provided a twenty minute presentation outlining the City's needs and key best practice recommendations. (Combating Bed bugs in Toronto - Attachment 1)

The summit was attended by Provincial Ministers and representatives from the Ministry of Community and Social Services, the Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration.

The recommendations tabled at the summit are to be forwarded to appropriate Ministers and Ministries with a view to assisting in the formulation of a Provincial strategy regarding bed bugs.

Toronto Bed Bug Web Site Survey:

In order to obtain an initial assessment of some the issues associated with bed bugs in Toronto, a self-completed survey was posted on the TPH bed bug website. Respondents to the survey can be assumed to over-represent the general population in terms of awareness of and/or being affected by the issue. The results, while not representative, provide a preliminary snapshot of current issues associated with bed bugs in Toronto by a sample of those using the website.

A total of 1988 people completed the online survey, 501 people identified as homeowners, 1306 identified as tenants and 41 identified as landlords.

Of the respondents who completed the survey:

- 27% were homeowners, 71% were tenants, and 2% were landlords; and
- 65% indicated that they were currently suffering from problems with bed bugs, 12% said that they had suffered from bed bug problems in the past, 23% said they had never had problems with bed bugs

Based on responses overall, three themes emerged which are used to frame the key results:

1. How tenants and landlords deal with bedbugs:
 - 17% of tenants and 36% of homeowners said that they treated their unit for bed bugs themselves with over-the-counter products;
 - 8% of tenants and 34% of homeowners said that they hired their own pest control company ;
 - 56% of homeowners spent over \$100 on pest control, and 24% said they spent over \$600;
 - 44% of tenants said that their landlord arranged professional control, and 57% said that their landlord paid for it;
 - 19% of both tenants and homeowners said that their bed bug infestation was resolved in one to three treatments, another 5% said it took four or more treatments, and 75% said that their problem was not yet resolved;

- 41% of tenants said that they were advised by their landlord on how to prepare their unit for pest control in writing, and another 23% said that they were advised verbally ;
 - 35% said they were not advised on how to prepare their unit for pest control at all, and 38% of respondents said that they were unable to finish all the preparation work before the pest control treatment started ; and
 - At the time when they had bed bugs, 91% of tenants and 90% of homeowners looked to the internet for information, and 68% of tenants and 47% of homeowners consulted Toronto Public Health.
2. Costs associated with bedbugs:
- 92% of tenants said that they had to pay at least some of the expenses due to bed bugs including laundry and clothing replacements, and over 44% of tenants said that they had to replace their sofa, bed, and/or another piece of furniture;
 - Of homeowners, over 37% said that they had to throw away clothing, furniture, and/or mattresses; and
 - 79% of tenants and 62% of homeowners reported spending over \$100 on replacing items, and 41% of tenants and 37% of homeowners said they spent over \$600.
3. Perspective of landlords:
- 10% of landlords said that they have no requests per month regarding bed bugs, 61% said they get between one and six requests per month, and 28% said they get seven or more;
 - 89% also said that they contacted a professional pest control company to treat for bed bugs. Only 16% said that the companies that they have used have always been effective;
 - Methods landlords use to prevent bud bug infestations include sealing cracks, providing communal vacuums and/or steam cleaners for tenants, providing educational materials to tenants on bed bugs, and providing policy, procedure, and resources for furniture disposal. 23% of landlords said they have not taken any measures to prevent bed bugs;
 - 85% of landlords said that they have had problems with tenants not properly preparing for pest control; and
 - 69% said that they have problems with tenants who were not cooperative, and 42% said they had tenants who refuse treatment.

City Divisions and Agencies:

Divisions within the City and Toronto Community Housing have continued to work proactively to address the issue of bedbugs. The following section provides an overview of actions undertaken by various Divisions in 2010 and previously.

Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC)

TCHC has continued to work in partnership with TPH on five pilot projects and it is expected that much of the work will be completed by the end of 2010. Bed bug

infestation levels in the buildings selected for these projects have been significantly reduced, but it is clear that early detection and treatment is essential and cooperation at all levels is needed.

The lessons learned during the pilot projects are being implemented in the control of bed bugs in TCHC buildings across the city. For example, in a heavily infested multi-residential building in downtown Toronto, the implementation of best practices including an initial building audit, community outreach and engagement, selective and targeted preparation and treatment, block inspections and preventative caulking and sealing, have contributed to a dramatic reduction in bed bug infestation levels.

Other initiatives for 2010 include:

- The projected expenditure of \$800,000 for pest control and prevention work in 2010. Pest control operators are being required to provide services in accordance with the best practices developed from the pilot projects. Treatment by the contractors also includes the provision of mattress encasements and preventative dusting.
- Sealing of apartments during the Unit Refurbishment Program (to date, 6,000 units have been completed).
- Replacement of common area carpeted floors that can harbour bedbugs with solid surfaces that can be cleaned with floor scrubbers. Work on 12 buildings has been completed with positive responses from tenants.
- Replacement of common area upholstered furniture with comfortable non-upholstered chairs and settees.
- Started loaner vacuum program to assist tenants in preparing their apartments for treatment.
- TCHC in partnership with TPH is working with a media arts student to produce an illustrated brochure on preparing apartments for cleaning.
- TCHC is currently working with a pest control contractor to test the effectiveness of thermal heat treatments of units as a potential bed bug control strategy.

Toronto Employment and Social Services (TESS)

TESS has continued to work as an active partner of the Toronto Bed Bug Project and has adjusted services to meet the needs of vulnerable clients impacted by bed bugs. These adjustments include:

- The issuing of funds to Torontonians receiving social assistance who are affected by bed bugs. These funds assist with the costs required to maintain a bed-bug free environment and can include furniture and household item replacements.
- The use of a holistic approach in service planning with clients who have ongoing/multiple bed bug exposures. Service plans can include making referrals to community partners and exploring housing alternatives.
- The development of a joint service protocol with TESS, TPH and Shelter Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) Work Skills Program (Bug and Scrub). TESS assists those residents receiving social assistance who TPH inspectors believe may not have the abilities or resources to ensure their home is prepared for treatment.

- TESS has partnered with TPH and SSHA in allocating funds to assist low income residents not on social assistance. These funds are used to provide vulnerable Torontonians with resources to assist in securing and maintaining a bed bug free environment.

Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA)

- SSHA continues to provide support to the TBBP as a member of the steering committee and through the ongoing work of the Seaton House Work Skills Program (Bug and Scrub). Bug and Scrub is designed to provide work skills opportunities to men staying at Seaton House. The men in the program, under staff supervision, work with vulnerable tenants to provide unit pre-treatment preparation and follow up after a unit has been treated. The focus of the services are community agencies who require advice and assistance and vulnerable populations who, because of one or more physical, social, or psychological barriers, are unable to prepare their unit before pest control measures can take place. Bug and Scrub has undertaken 97 extreme clean services for vulnerable clients and has assisted TCHC in unit assessments and caulking and sealing units.
- SSHA has also been instrumental in establishing linkages with the Furniture Bank. The Furniture Bank currently is providing storage for mattresses donated to TBBP.
- SSHA, along with the Province of Ontario, funded a research project into the resurgence of bed bugs and a study of bed bug issues within Habitat rooming and boarding homes.
- SSHA has recently approved small capital grants totalling \$250,000 for three community agencies that provide service to people who are homeless; \$47,000 of this funding is specifically to help address bed bug issues.
- SSHA has continued to collaborate with TESS and TPH to ensure funding for unit preparation for those clients who do not qualify for Ontario Works or Ontario Disabilities Support Program funding.
- SSHA continues to support shelters in monitoring and managing bed bugs and on an annual basis surveys agencies to determine the current status of the issue within the shelter system.

Toronto Office of Partnerships

Through the Toronto Office of Partnerships, the City has attracted private sector contributions to support its efforts to assist vulnerable residents in the elimination of bed bugs.

Beginning in January 2009, Caber Distributors Inc., which supplies bedding products to retailers such as Sleep Country, has assisted with the replacement of infested bedding. .

They have donated a quantity of mattress encasements, are making a monthly donation of encasements and linens, and are also providing opened but unused products, as well as assisting with emergency cases. This material is distributed by the City to residents who cannot afford to replace these materials. The total value of Caber's commitment to date is estimated at \$25,000.

Toronto Public Health

Toronto Public Health continues to provide advice, bed bug identification services, inspection services in problematic cases, education/outreach sessions, liaison with landlords, coordination of extreme clean events and case management for vulnerable clients.

Toronto Public Health currently has seconded three Public Health Inspectors from existing programs, to work exclusively on the bed bug issue and to support the activities of the Toronto Bed Bug Project. Public Health Inspectors in the regional Health Hazard program are now also assisting in responding to bed bug requests as the demand for services continues to increase. In addition, Public Health Nurses from the Vulnerable Adults and Seniors Injury Prevention program have been diverted to assist with this initiative.

While the redirection of inspection staff in Public Health from other areas of work has allowed TPH to actively support the Bed Bug Project, as the duration and scale of the project extends, it will limit response times in other areas of inspection activity.

To date this risk has been effectively managed internally, however TPH will soon reach the point where external events (e.g. food borne outbreaks,) will place pressures on the system, and maintaining current levels of involvement in the Bed Bug project may not be supported without assistance.

As of September 30, Toronto Public Health has responded to 1,587 requests for service regarding bed bugs in 2010. In the course of responding to these requests and in supporting the Toronto Bed Bug Project initiatives, more than 3,500 apartments have been inspected / assessed for bed bug infestations during this period. Working with other divisions and social service agencies, Public Health Inspectors have coordinated and assisted in 110 apartment unit preparation/extreme cleaning operations. Public Health Nurses have assisted in obtaining social supports for 30 vulnerable clients in an attempt to ensure that they continue to lead relatively independent healthy lives in the community.

The Toronto Public Health Bed Bug web site remains an important channel of public education. This site contains information in thirteen languages, and includes information on how to identify bed bugs, information for tenants, landlords, pest control operators and travellers. As of September 30, there have been 88,097 visits to the bed bug section of the site in 2010. Currently this site is undergoing an update as a pilot website of the toronto.ca Web Re:Brand project. The redesigned bed bug section of the site is currently scheduled to go live in mid December.

Municipal Licensing and Standards (ML&S)

ML&S invited TPH to participate in the Multi-Residential Apartment Building Strategy (MRAB). This partnership was undertaken on a pilot project basis to provide a gauge as to the level of bed bug infestations in non-social housing settings. At the end of the pilot project, it was determined that, based on the complaints received by staff of ML&S, less

than 10% of the buildings inspected required interventions by TPH and consequently did not justify assigning full time staff to this initiative at this time. Currently, all public health issues encountered by ML&S staff in the course of their MRAB inspection activities are forwarded to TPH through existing complaint referral protocols.

Toronto Bed Bug Project – Community Partners Report

Attachment 2 to this report is a brief report by the Community Partners engaged on the TBBP. The report has been authored by the Community Partners of the Toronto Bed Bug Project and is being provided to the Board for information purposes.

2011 Plans

It is the intent of the TBBP to continue the development and expansion of inter-agency partnerships and to attempt to leverage more sustainable support to assist vulnerable clients.

Given that the Province will be undertaking a province-wide education and awareness campaign regarding the control of bed bugs, the City will be aligning current bed bug control messaging with that of the Province, and more emphasis will be placed on local, targeted education and outreach initiatives.

TPH, as part of its contribution to the overall TBBP, will be working to examine options to further strengthen the Public Health efforts in this area and to develop options to address gaps and to contribute to longer term, sustainable response to the issue.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Combatting Bed bugs in Toronto
Attachment 2: Toronto Bed Bug Project – Community Partners Report