

Bed Bug Infestations in City-Owned Housing

Date:	May 28, 2012
To:	Toronto Board of Health
From:	Medical Officer of Health
Wards:	All Wards
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

Toronto Public Health (TPH) has been involved in supporting bed bug control activities since 2005. During the period May 1, 2011, to March 31, 2012, a dedicated multi-disciplinary team realized substantial service accomplishments. In 2011, the one-time provincial funding (\$1,216,518) was allocated to: fund a Manager and six Public Health Inspectors (PHIs) who worked with three public health nurses in a multi-disciplinary Bed Bug Team; to purchase necessary resources such as extreme cleaning/unit preparation services and client replacement supplies; and, to support community capacity building with key partners in the City.

The Bed Bug Team worked closely with Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) and Shelter Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) on bed bug infestations control and prevention. In addition, the TPH Bed Bug Team established partnerships with private sector associations, including the Greater Toronto Apartment Association which has a membership of more than 60% of private landlords throughout the greater Toronto area.

This report provides an overview and analysis of the occurrence of bed bug infestations in City-owned housing, as well as a summary of the steps taken by the TPH Bed Bug Team to identify and prevent infestations.

Financial Impact

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

DECISION HISTORY

There is a history of reports, decisions and recommendations made by the BOH and City Council regarding bed bug control activities dating back to 2008. At its meeting of April 30, 2012, Board of Health requested the Medical Officer of Health to report directly to

the May 8, 2012 meeting of City Council on the number of City-owned buildings, including Toronto Community Housing Corporation buildings and shelters in which the Bed Bug Team has undertaken treatments, and the frequency of visits for each location. This report contains additional information on infestations in TCHC buildings which was not available in the report to the May 8, 2012 meeting of City Council.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Bed bugs remain an on-going housing, public health and social issue that is likely to continue for some time in all parts of the City and across all social and economic strata. Vulnerable populations including the frail elderly, physically and mentally challenged, and low-income families face a disproportionate share of the burden of bed bug infestations across the City. This poses a unique challenge in controlling the level and degree of infestations, as well as prevention and treatment. Vulnerable populations often lack the financial resources and/or the physical or mental capacity to appropriately address infestations and prevent recurrence without assistance.

Reporting of bed bug infestations or related information is not legally required under the Health Promotion and Protection Act (HPPA) or other legislation. It is therefore difficult to build a complete picture of the burden of bed bugs in Toronto.

Due to the voluntary nature of bed bug reporting a higher number of infestations for a given building may reflect lack of attention to the issue of bed bugs from residents and building administrators, but equally likely may reflect better detection of infestations due to collaboration between building operators and the Bed Bug Team.

COMMENTS

Landlords, both private and public, have in the experience of TPH been largely responsive to the issue of bed bug infestations. TCHC has in place protocols for inspection, assessment and treatment for all its properties (see the April 30, 2012 Bed Bug Update Report Attachment 4: <http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2012/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-46564.pdf>).

The TPH Bed Bug Team has achieved significant successes, including the elimination of 1517 infestations. These efforts also result in reducing the risk of bed bug migration from one unit to another (secondary infestations), and reduce the overall "load" of the number of bed bugs in a building or residence. This further reduces the risk of the proliferation or transportation of bed bugs (hitchhikers) in other community settings such as community centres, hospitals, movie theatres or the TTC.

Toronto Public Health Bed Bug Team

With the receipt of provincial funding in 2011-12 (including one-time funding), TPH took the lead on a City-wide strategy focused on vulnerable populations and, from May 1, 2011 – March 31, 2012, bed bug service requests received by the TPH Bed Bug Team were from every ward across the City.

Requests for Service and Findings:

Of the 1604 requests for bed bug service, 736 resulted in a finding of at least 1 bed bug infested unit. Through initial inspections, block inspections and building audits, a total of 4473 units were inspected either by PHIs or by third parties as a result of TPH investigations. Of these, 1517 units were identified as having bed bugs.

Block inspections and building audits

In the event that a PHI suspects that a bed bug infestation may have spread to neighbouring units, a block inspection is carried out. Block inspections involve assessment of surrounding units in all three dimensions surrounding the unit of concern, and are either carried out by PHIs or by pest control/landlords.

Where PHIs believe that more than a block inspection is warranted for rare cases of severe infestation, a building audit may be carried out. A building audit involves floor by floor inspection of all units of concern, and may be carried out by landlords and pest control companies where the inspection requires resources beyond the Bed Bug Team.

Section 13 Orders

Section 13 Orders, requiring elimination of a health hazard under the Health Protection and Promotion Act, are sometimes warranted when PHIs have found that, despite initial requests, landlords and/or tenants have not attended to what have been identified as health hazards by PHIs. The issuing of Section 13 Orders occurs almost always when adequate education and guidance for remediation has been provided by PHIs yet landlords or tenants have not acted to deal with an infestation.

Frequency of Infestations in City Owned Housing

Toronto Community Housing Corporation:

Toronto Community Housing Corporation is the largest social housing provider in Canada and the second largest in North America. It is home to approximately 164,000 tenants in 58,500 households, including seniors, families, singles, refugees, recent immigrants to Canada and people with special needs. The portfolio includes more than 360 high-rise and low-rise apartment buildings throughout the city.

TCHC houses a diverse population including a significant number of individuals who face a range of social and health challenges. The corporation has partnered with TPH on the issue of bed bug infestations to support successful tenancy over the last few years. In 2011-12, the TPH Bed Bug Team worked closely with TCHC on implementing the bed bug control strategy including the allocation of \$100,000 from the one-time provincial funding to support expanding existing capacity for unit preparation and support and extreme cleaning coordination.

Through partnership efforts and commitment to addressing bed bug infestations, TCHC has reported conducting 12,332 bed bug pest control treatments between January 1, 2011 and March 31, 2012. The information provided in this report represents data on infestations available from TPH records on visits to TCHC buildings.

**Property Units Found To Have Bed Bugs through TPH Bed Bug Team Investigations
May 1, 2011 – March 31, 2012**

	TCHC	Other	Total
Number of infested units	547	970	1517
Number of unique buildings	108	411	519
Number of block inspections	152	313	465
Number of building audits	8	27	35
HPPA Orders	3	17	20

Further insights into the occurrence of bed bugs in TCHC Buildings can be gleaned from TPH records of vulnerable clients with infestations.

Between May 1, 2011 and March 31, 2012, the public health nurses of the TPH Bed Bug Team assessed and supported 180 vulnerable clients dealing with bed bug infestations, and of these, 80 (or 44%) lived in 43 TCHC buildings. The breakdown is as follows:

- one TCHC building had 17 vulnerable clients/units with bed bugs that the PHNs supported (of these 17 clients/units, 4 were recurring infestations);
- one TCHC building had 6 vulnerable clients/units with bed bugs that the PHNs supported;
- four TCHC buildings had 3 vulnerable clients/units each with bed bugs that the PHNs supported;
- eight TCHC building had 2 vulnerable clients/units each with bed bugs that the PHNs supported; and
- 29 TCHC buildings had one vulnerable client/unit each with bed bugs that the PHNs supported.

Note: The above refer to those vulnerable clients who live in TCHC buildings who were referred to the public health nurses on the TPH Bed Bug Team (for support), and does not necessarily reflect the full rate of bed bug infestations in TCHC housing.

CONCLUSION

The one-time provincial Bed Bug Support Fund ended March 31, 2012. At its April 30, 2012 meeting, the Board of Health (BOH) passed a motion requesting City Council allocate \$180,000 to the TPH 2012 Operating Budget for the Bed Bug Team. This motion was referred to the City's Budget Committee on May 7, 2012, and was approved by the Committee on the condition that the province contributes a minimum of \$500,000 to TPH's Bed Bug Program in 2012.

The minimum of \$500,000 of provincial funding would allow TPH to reinstate the TPH Bed Bug Team including six PHIs. This approval by the City Budget Committee is in keeping with the unanimous support by Council for the continuation of provincial support to the program at meetings on February 7, 2012 and April 10, 2012. The \$500,000 does

not take into account any costs that may have to be incurred in monitoring and measuring the progress of the city's bed bug initiative.

The Medical Officer of Health (MOH) wrote to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, on May 18, 2012. The letter outlines the impact of the loss of one-time provincial funding on bed bug infestations and on vulnerable clients, and requests the province to consider funding the TPH Bed Bug Team by contributing a minimum of \$500,000 in 2012.

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SIGNATURE

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