



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Toronto Public Health's Response to Bed Bugs

Date:	November 3, 2009
To:	Board of Health
From:	Medical Officer of Health
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

Bed bug infestations continue to be problematic for residents of Toronto and are of particular concern for Toronto's most vulnerable residents. Over the last eighteen months Toronto Public Health (TPH) has worked closely with community stakeholders and other city divisions to develop a city-wide integrated response to manage the bed bug problem in Toronto.

This report is a companion document to the Toronto Bed Bug Project's report, "Bed Bugs in Toronto - Developing an Effective Response" (Attachment 1). This report also outlines TPH's response to the bed bug problem in Toronto and recommends continued support of the Toronto Bed Bug Project into 2010.

TPH work in addressing the bed bug problem in Toronto is presently funded through reallocation of resources from other mandated programs. This is not sustainable in the long term.

Since the establishment of the Toronto Bed Bug Project in March 2008, TPH has responded to 2266 requests for service from the public, undertaken more than 90 education seminars reaching over 2000 members of the public and inspected 3000 apartment units. In addition, working closely with the Bug and Scrub Team, TPH has assisted more than 65 vulnerable residents with extreme cleaning in preparation for bed bug pesticide treatment of their units.

It is recommended that TPH continue to be an active partner in the Toronto Bed Bug Project (TBBP) in 2010. The efforts of the Project's workgroups together with the work currently being undertaken in five pilot projects continues and these efforts have resulted

in the development and implementation of a number of successful bed bug control strategies.

Bed bugs remain an extremely challenging pest to eradicate. The management of bed bugs requires adequate financial resources plus supports and co-operation of those affected. The work of the Toronto Bed Bug Project is not yet complete and it is essential that all partners remain engaged in 2010 in order to continue to develop effective and comprehensive responses to bed bugs. This will build knowledge and experience at the municipal and community level.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. Toronto Public Health supports the Toronto Bed Bug Project in 2010 through the continued reallocation of resources;
2. The Board of Health reiterate its request to the Government of Ontario to fund bed bug control initiatives for vulnerable populations as part of their poverty reduction strategy;
3. The Toronto Bed Bug Project provide an annual report in the fall of 2010 on progress to date; and
4. Copies of this report to be forwarded to the Toronto Community Housing Corporation, The Greater Toronto Apartment Association and the Ontario Non Profit Housing Association for information.

Financial Impact

In 2009, City Council approved one-time funding of \$75,000 to be absorbed by Toronto Employment and Social Services (TESS), TPH and Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA), split equally at \$25,000 per program within each Program's 2009 Approved Operating Budget.

The TPH Bed Bug Unit in 2009 has been supported by three Public Health Inspectors and two Public Health Nurses who have been re-assigned to this work from the Health Hazard and the Vulnerable Adults programs. These resources will continue to support the Bed Bug Project in 2010 and the estimated cost of continuing this project is \$500,000 gross and \$125,000 net which will be absorbed within TPH 2010 Operating Budget. TPH will continue to work with TESS and SSHA in the delivery of this program in 2010.

The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

In February 2008, the Board of Health endorsed a recommendation from the Medical Officer of Health that an action committee on bed bugs be created with a goal of developing a city-wide integrated response to the bed bug problem. This resulted in the creation of the Toronto Bed Bug Project.

In November 2008, a progress report from the Toronto Bed Bug Project was submitted to the Board of Health and included a one time funding request of \$75,000 through the 2009 budget approval process to assist the most vulnerable clients prepare for bed bug treatment. This report also included a request that the General Manager, Shelter Support Housing Administration seek funding for the enhancement of The Bug and Scrub initiative.

While the work of the Toronto Bed Bug Project has not been completed, this document, a companion report to the Toronto Bed Bug Project's community report "Bed Bugs in Toronto - Developing an Effective Response", provides an outline of the work completed to date and proposed directions for 2010.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

As with many major cities in North America, Toronto is experiencing a resurgence of bed bug infestations.

There is a very common misconception that bed bugs can be eliminated by simply applying pesticides. This is not the case since bed bugs have the ability to develop resistance to pesticides and they are elusive and hardy pests. The management of bed bugs is extremely labour intensive and complex, particularly in multi-residential settings. The pest control industry has a very limited range of pesticides that can be used and these are generally only effective if they are sprayed directly on the bed bugs. It is therefore widely recognized that an integrated pest management (IPM) strategy is the most effective approach. IPM is a multi-faceted approach using a combination of pesticide and non-pesticide approaches (de-cluttering, sealing cracks and crevices, steam cleaning, vacuuming, etc).

Although anybody can get bed bugs, vulnerable populations tend to be most severely impacted in that they lack resources or capacity to sufficiently deal with the problem.

COMMENTS

The Toronto Bed Bug Project was established to manage this infestation problem on a number of fronts and while the work has not been completed, the following are some of the achievements recorded thus far:

- **Development of a Toronto Public Health Bed Bug website** - TPH has developed a comprehensive bed bug website www.toronto.ca/health/bedbugs. As of September 30, 2009, the website has received over 56,000 hits including a significant number of international hits.

- **Development of fact sheets** - TPH has developed 17 fact sheets on various topics related to bed bugs and the basic bed bug biology fact sheet is now available in 14 languages.
- **Online Survey** - An online survey has been created on the website to gather information on how bed bugs affect peoples' lives. There are specific questions for homeowners, landlords and tenants. This survey will assist TPH in gathering a more detailed picture of infestations in Toronto.
- **Requests for Service** – From March 2008 to August 2009, TPH has responded to 2266 requests for service regarding bed bugs.
- **Bed bug inspections/assessments** – approximately 3000 bed bug inspections/assessment have been completed since March 2008.
- **Information and Training** - More than 2000 members of the public have received information and training on bed bug controls through more than 90 educational/ outreach events. Pre-scheduled information sessions, as well as sessions requested by tenant groups, city departments and individual agencies have been accommodated.
- **Implementation of an operational partnership between TPH and Municipal Licensing and Standards** – Public Health Inspectors have now joined the Multi-Residential Apartment Building Program (MRAB) team and are available on site to respond to tenant issues/concerns regarding bed bugs, to identify vulnerable clients in need and to deal with any other health hazards Issues.
- **City Contributions and Private Sector Donations** – Through the efforts of The Deputy City Manager an allocation of \$5000 was provided to the Toronto Bed Bug Project. Mattress encasements, vinyl mattress covers, rubber pillows and industrial steamers were purchased with the funds. Additional donations of mattresses and mattress encasements have been received from the private sector.

Ongoing Work

The work of the Toronto Bed Bug Project is not yet complete. Work must continue in a number of areas to ensure progress in controlling bed bugs across the City.

Currently, work is underway to enhance partnerships and collaboration between City Divisions (SSHA, TESS, Solid Waste Services and ML&S) to ensure early bed bug detection and appropriate responses to complaints, and more effective support for vulnerable clients. Also, efforts are being made to establish operational partnerships with community support organizations such as Toronto Central CCAC, TCHC, and Bug and Scrub, to assist the most vulnerable clients with case management, follow-up supports and fast tracking referrals.

Education and outreach efforts are one of the most effective measures in controlling bed bugs. Training and information sessions will continue to be provided for city staff, landlord and tenant groups, community agencies/organizations and residents of the City of Toronto. In the coming year, education and outreach efforts will be expanded to include institutions such as schools, daycares, rooming houses and nursing homes. In addition, work will continue on the development of an educational campaign that focuses on reducing stigma, increasing bed bug awareness, and early detection as keys to prevention.

The control of bed bugs is a labour intensive and costly initiative with the vulnerable being most severely impacted. TPH staff are frequently confronted with situations where there is no funding to assist the most vulnerable with extreme cleaning and the replacement of heavily infested/damaged furniture and personal belongings. Work must therefore continue in advocating for additional funding from both the private and public sectors and TPH will continue to seek out partnerships in order to help the most vulnerable recover from bed bug infestations.

Future Directions

Bed bugs are likely to continue to be a problem and efforts must continue to ensure the development and application of timely and effective control measures and to ensure Toronto keeps abreast of current trends in the spread and control of bed bugs.

TPH will continue to monitor and participate in inter-agency collaboration efforts locally and internationally as well as in the private and government sectors.

TPH will also be exploring options for the development of an accessible tracking and monitoring tool for use by the pest control industry. Information relating to pesticide treatments for bed bugs will provide one of the most useful tools in detecting infestation trends.

TPH, working with its partners in the Toronto Bed Bug Project, will also continue to monitor and explore the feasibility of innovative legislative approaches used in the control of bed bugs. It is anticipated that issues such as the disposal of infested furniture and mandated treatment standards for used furniture will be dealt with in the next two years.

Pilot Projects

TPH has continued to work with TCHC on five pilot projects across the City. Unfortunately, the recent labour disruption delayed a number of assessment and control activities. However, progress continues to be made and the projects are providing valuable information about which strategies are most successful.

As a result of the ongoing work to control bed bugs, TCHC has begun implementation of a number of initiatives including improving building management practices, enhancing the integrated pest management approach in buildings, and the development and implementation of a mental health framework to assist the most vulnerable tenants (Attachment 2).

Conclusion

Over the last two years, it has become clear that the bed bugs in Toronto are a complex and costly problem, requiring labour intensive interventions for effective management.

Toronto Public Health is not adequately resourced to undertake this task and the realignment of staff to work on this issue is not sustainable in the long term.

Work on the development of partnerships with all participants in the Toronto Bed Bug Project will continue with specific emphasis being placed on early detection and case management for Toronto's vulnerable populations. The goal is to create a climate in which residents, tenants, landlords, community agencies and public agencies will be in a better position to deal with bed bug infestations.

CONTACT

Reg Ayre
Manager, Healthy Environments
Tel: 416-338-8037
Fax: 416-338-1643
E-mail: rayre@toronto.ca

Ron de Burger
Director, Healthy Environments
Tel: 416-338-7953
Fax: 416-392-0713
E-mail: rdeburg@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

Dr. David McKeown
Medical Officer of Health

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Bed Bugs in Toronto –Developing an Effective Response (October 2009)
Attachment 2 – Toronto Community Housing Pest Management Program