



Medical News Today photo

Just three bed bugs *and a whole lot of commotion*

By DAVID GREEN

There's a new organism for Morenci's science students to learn about: *Cimex lectularius* or the common bed bug.

The presence of the insect in Morenci Area Schools last week led to a two-day closure while certain areas of the school were treated.

Bed bug problems in schools are fairly common, said Morenci Superintendent of Schools Mike McAran—Adrian had an issue just last month—but closure of buildings doesn't happen all that often.

Despite media reports about the incident that were reported in newspapers as far away as Washington, D.C., the situation wasn't much different than what many schools have experienced.

There was no infestation of the pest, McAran said, because only three bed bugs were found. The problem grew when parents decided to keep children out of school for fear of bed bugs coming home with them.

Last Tuesday morning in the high school science room, students found two insects that were identified by the school principal as bed bugs.

Later a third bed bug was found in another high school room.

An employee at the elementary school found what was thought to be a bed bug, but a pest management service determined that it wasn't. However, word spread quickly before it was identified and social media took over.

Parents became alarmed and 110 students were absent by the end of the day Wednesday, with some students taken out of school by parents during the day.

"I knew it was going to be even worse on Thursday," McAran said, and the decision was made to close school on Thursday and Friday while clean-up measures were taken.

He spoke with a retired pest

control specialist who formerly served the district and learned that a rubbing alcohol spray could be used. In addition, a heat treatment that maintains a temperature above 120° could be used to kill bugs and eggs.

McAran also learned that the Adrian School District has used a dog trained to sniff for bed bugs, and all three techniques were used in Morenci at suspected locations including certain classrooms and lockers.

A dog located one of the three bugs and showed interest in some other areas where residue might have existed from a bed bug's past stages of growth—including in the elementary school—but no bugs were located.

One study found that trained dogs have accuracy in the mid-to-high 90 percent range, although success depends on the dog and the trainer. The cost of the canine visit was \$1,000. A contract for heat treating and applying a pesticide that lasts 90 days cost \$7,820.

Information was made available to parents on the school website that explained the alcohol spray, including a Material Safety Data Sheet.

The letter suggested that parents could wash backpacks and winter outer clothing, then dry it on a high heat setting.

School personnel first started to wrap and remove fabric-covered furniture, but pest management personnel from Bullseye Pest Defense said that wrapping was not necessary. The nocturnal insects do not jump off an item and onto a person. They're seldom seen except at night if a bug emerges from an enclosed area to feed.

McAran said he received a call from the Lenawee County Health Department inquiring about the incident. After he described the steps taken, he was told that the district's response followed protocol exactly as written.

A representative from the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development visited the school Monday to inspect records of actions taken. That agency was impressed that a small, rural district kept such detailed records of pesticide application over the years, McAran said, crediting Erica Metcalf in the school board office.

McAran said that state law prohibits a school district from excluding a student with bed bugs unless repeated attempts have failed to remedy the situation. However, the parents of the suspected student were contacted.

McAran said that people tend to have a misconception about the presence of bed bugs, believing that it's related to poor housekeeping. However, a bed bug problem can arise even in an immaculate home, he said.

"You often just don't know where they come from," McAran said. "Some people bring them home after staying in a hotel."

McAran said that he asked the pest management worker if the district had a bed bug problem.

"You don't have a problem," he said, "you have a rumor."

- An adult bed bug is about the size of a small apple seed. They are often found under mattresses and in mattress seams. They also like to hide in crevices of upholstered furniture. They typically come out at night to feed on a sleeping human.

- If you suspect that an insect bite came from a bed bug, look for these signs: blood stains on pillows or sheets; dark spots of bed bug excrement on sheets and mattresses; shed skins; an offensive musty odor.

- Don't look under sheets to check for bed bugs in a hotel. Lift up the mattress where they might be hiding.

