

Bed Bugs Outbreak in a Church Camp – Maryland, 2005

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Background: Anecdotal reports in the United States suggest an increase of bed bugs infestation in transient dwellings and homes. We investigated a camp-associated outbreak and present lessons learned about the diagnosis and eradication of bed bugs.

Methods: The investigation included case interviews, collection of clinical diagnoses, skin scrapings to rule-out scabies, and facility inspections. Cases were defined as new erythematous body rash after staying at the camp.

Results: Rash illnesses were identified in 18 persons from 5 separate groups that stayed at the camp between August and November 2005. No groups had stays at the lodge that overlapped with other groups, and the gap between affected groups ranged from 1 to 3 days. Cases stayed in the same building (building A) at the lodge facility. At least 13 cases sought medical care and a majority were diagnosed with scabies. Other diagnoses included ringworm, chiggers, allergies, fleabites, and jock itch. Skin scrapings from 3 cases identified no mites. Nine cases were prescribed medications to treat their rash. Camp staff reported no rashes and did not sleep in the affected lodge building. Environmental inspection by a pest control operator resulted in the capture of bed bugs. Bed bug eradication was difficult and costly, requiring applications of multiple pesticides on 5 separate occasions.

Conclusions: At first, cases were diagnosed with scabies, but further investigation showed evidence that bed bug bites were the likely cause of all rashes. The findings underscore the need to consider bed bug bites as part of the differential diagnosis of body rashes, especially those associated with transient dwellings, so cases are treated properly and appropriate integrated pest management is implemented.
