

**CITY OF BALTIMORE**

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**HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Health Department Announces Bed Bug Plan

**BALTIMORE** (April 20, 2009) The Baltimore City Health Department is releasing a comprehensive strategy to reduce bed bug infestation in the city.

Bed bugs are small wingless insects that feed only on blood. They prefer the blood of humans but also feed on the blood of other animals including the family pet. They are most active at night when people are sleeping, and they prefer to feed in the dark. The most common symptom of bed bugs is itching. Those most vulnerable to adverse health effects from bed bug bites include the elderly, disabled, and young children.

Compared to other common pests, bed bugs are more difficult and expensive to eradicate. Bed bug extermination often requires multiple professional treatments. In addition, all exposed clothes and stuffed animals must be bagged and cleaned or removed. Furniture and mattresses with holes or tears must be marked, contained, and thrown out. Professional treatment of bed bugs ranges from approximately \$300 (one-time treatment) to \$900 (multiple treatments with 90 day warranty).

Data suggest an increase in bed bugs in the city in recent years, rising to about 4 calls to 311 per month. Under this plan, developed in consultation with the Environmental Protection Agency and the New York City Department of Health, the Health Department has taken the following steps to strengthen the City's response to bed bugs:

### **1. Establishing an inspections and enforcement program**

The Healthy Homes Division started performing bed bug inspections on December 1, 2008 and has developed a specialized bed bug protocol, a violation notice, a work plan, and educational materials. Enforcement is pursued under Housing Code for all multi-family dwelling units and businesses.

### **2. Expanding public health education on bed bugs**

The Division will educate Baltimore residents about bed bugs through public service announcements, a *promotores* (community outreach workers) program, and dissemination of educational materials. The EPA is partnering with us to develop mass media (television, radio, and print) educational messages in Spanish. This targeted outreach will be conducted as a part of the EPA Pesticide Program's Hispanic Outreach Initiative.

In addition to working with EPA on a Spanish-language media campaign, the Division has integrated bed bug education into the lead and healthy homes *promotores* program launched in January, 2009.

### **3. Supporting the Housing Authority's bed bug response**

The Healthy Homes Division has collaborated with the Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC) to improve and streamline its response to bed bugs. Heads of maintenance and management at all 32 HABC sites have received information about the need to immediately respond to bed bug complaints, and information on how to minimize infestations.

### **4. Providing national leadership**

Baltimore City is one of the first cities in the nation to be developing an in-depth protocol, violation notice, work plan, and response system. The EPA invited representatives from the Healthy Homes Division to participate in a “Bed Bug Summit” that will bring together national experts to explore the various dimensions of the bed bug problem and develop a strategic action plan for addressing bed bugs at the national and local levels.

For more information on bed bugs, please visit the Health Department’s website at <http://www.baltimorehealth.org/bedbugs>.

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