

Bedbug anxiety hits South Korea, Japan



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Now there are tiny wingless insects that feast on your blood in the middle of the night. Yes, we're talking about bedbugs. A recent scourge of pests in France has now hit South Korea and experts warn Japan could be next. NHK World's Hirayama Akihide has more on the havoc being unleashed around the world.

Earlier this fall Paris was in the grips of bedbug paranoia. Sightings of the insects on trains, buses, and cinemas were going viral.

It's surprising. Yes. What is surprising is that... how do I explain it... I mean, the fact that we can actually see them means there are a lot of them.

France has been scrambling to contain the threat ahead of the 2024 Olympics, but it appears bedbugs are having a global resurgence. South Korea is reporting its largest spread in 40 years. They are calling it a "pindemic" like "pandemic" and a Korean term for the bugs. More than 150 infestations have been reported across the country in the last 3 months. Authorities have started a campaign to stop the spread.

It is difficult for citizens to completely eliminate bedbugs by themselves, so I have ordered all city departments in Seoul to take preemptive actions.

The South Korean government set up a 4-week pest control period. 140,000 places like low budget hotels and public baths are under inspection. Seoul is offering some business owners subsidies if they need to deal with bedbugs.

The government has decided to act to urgently stop the spread of the bedbugs before private businesses incur financial damage.

Experts warn the pests are hiding in luggage and are coming in from overseas. During the day, the bugs are known to hide in walls, inside furniture, and bedding. They come out at night and feed on blood. Although they don't transmit infectious diseases, they can cause extreme itchiness, making it difficult to sleep. In Japan, the presence of bedbugs is not new, but the number of reported cases has been rising over the last decade, so the country's pest control association recorded nearly 700 calls about bedbugs between last April and March this year. This expert warns that eradicating bedbugs involves more than just being clean.

Bedbugs can happen regardless of whether the facility is clean or not. A female insect can lay hundreds of eggs in its lifetime after mating. No matter how beautiful the room is, it may not be possible to prevent bedbugs from entering.

Still Natsuaki says travelers can do things to prevent taking the bugs home.

The main way they get around is by getting into a suitcase or bag and moving to the next place. You don't want to scatter your luggage. Put it in a large plastic bag and place it near the entrance if possible. It will be safer.

However, once bedbugs are inside the home, Japanese authorities urge people to have an exterminator intervene. So for now, the race to stop the spread of bedbugs continues, but with holiday travel around the corner, it won't be an easy task.

Source: (NHK World News)

Now discuss the questions with a partner.

1. Have you ever heard of bedbugs? What information do you know about them?
2. What types of places do you think bedbugs could spread?
3. Have you ever experienced any trouble with insects? How did you get rid of them?
4. Can you think of any other strategies to reduce the spread of bedbugs?
5. What insects do you think are the most troublesome? Why?