

Correspondence

Widespread bullous eruption due to multiple bed bug bites

SIR, Bullous insect bites may be very widespread and cause diagnostic confusion. We would like to draw readers' attention to a particularly severe bullous eruption due to multiple bed bug bites, acquired in London.

A 32-year-old Spanish man who had only been in London for 2 weeks presented to Casualty with a 2-week history of an extremely itchy widespread bullous eruption. Examination revealed more than 150 tense bullae, some of which were haemorrhagic. Urticated papules and plaques were also present, some with a central purpuric area. The majority of the lesions were arranged in a linear configuration (Fig. 1).

Further questioning revealed that he had seen several insects crawling around his bedsit, including inside his sleeping bag. Several of the offending creatures were brought in and were identified as bed bugs (*Cimex lectularius*) (Fig. 2). Due to the severity of his symptoms and the vast number of lesions, he was treated with oral prednisolone and flucloxacillin, to which he rapidly responded.

Bed bugs are nocturnal, blood-sucking parasites that feed most avidly in the hour before dawn. They hide away during the day in cracks in the walls and floors and in furniture. They are attracted by heat and carbon dioxide to feed on suitable hosts.¹ Adults are flat, ovoid and reddish brown in colour and measure approximately 5 mm in length.

Bullous insect bites are an important differential to consider in any bullous eruption, and due to the severity of the clinical features in this case, and the initial lack of a detailed history, were initially overlooked. Interestingly the patient had a history of bullous reactions to mosquito bites and we presume this tendency, coupled with exposure to a large number of bugs, resulted in the florid eruption observed. Indeed, previous reports have suggested that a severe reaction is more likely with repeated bites.²

Although travellers to exotic locations may be familiar with bed bug bites they are infrequently considered as a cause of reactions in the UK. Better living standards have reduced their prevalence, although it has been suggested that their numbers may be increasing again in the UK.³ This case serves to illustrate that bed bugs are certainly prolific in this part of south London. Also concerning is the

fact that they are able to survive for longer than 1 year without a suitable food source.

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Figure 1 Multiple bullae on the lateral aspect of the right hand and forearm.



Figure 2 Deceased bed bug (ventral aspect).

References

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- 3 Paul J, Bates J. Is infestation with the common bedbug increasing? *Br Med J* 2000; **320**: 1141.