



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Avoid the Fog

Acute Illnesses and Injuries Related to Total Release Foggers — 10 States, 2007-2015

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[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Dr. Kathleen Dooling] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Kathleen Dooling.

Trying to be a do-it-yourself exterminator might save you some money, but if pesticide instructions aren't closely followed, bugs won't be the only ones who suffer.

Dr. Geoffrey Calvert is with CDC's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. He's joining us today by telephone to discuss the dangers of improper use of pesticides, particularly so-called bug bombs. Welcome to the show, Geoff.

[Dr. Calvert] Thank you for having me.

[Dr. Dooling] Geoff, what is a bug bomb?

[Dr. Calvert] A bug bomb is a pesticide product used indoors to kill cockroaches, fleas, ants, spiders, and flying insects. Bug bombs look like your typical can of bug spray, however, they're different in one important aspect. And that is, with bug bombs, when you activate it, it releases its entire contents and produces a poisonous fog in your home.

[Dr. Dooling] How many people become ill each year from using bug bombs?

[Dr. Calvert] About 400 people become ill each year from using bug bombs. However, this estimate is probably an underestimate—a low estimate—for two reasons. First, we only had data from 10 states, and second, we get our data from poison control centers and from physicians who notify local public health authorities when they treat a person with pesticide poisoning. So, if an individual doesn't call poison control and isn't sick enough to go to their doctor, we don't detect those cases.

[Dr. Dooling] What health problems can result from improper use of these products?

[Dr. Calvert] Bug bombs can produce problems involving your lungs, as well as your digestive system. So the types of lung problems that you could experience include cough, shortness of breath, wheezing, congestion, sore throat, and runny nose. The types of digestive problems you could experience include nausea, vomiting, and abdominal pain and abdominal cramping.

[Dr. Dooling] What should someone do if they're experiencing symptoms of pesticide exposure?

[Dr. Calvert] Most of the health problems that are caused by bug bombs and by pesticide exposures, in general, are relatively minor, which means the symptoms will resolve with time and, generally, they don't need medical attention. However, about one person out of five who is poisoned by pesticides has a more severe illness and should receive medical treatment. So, if you have things like breathing difficulties, wheezing, uncontrolled vomiting, severe abdominal pain or severe cramping, frequent diarrhea, or any other health problem that you think is serious, you should contact your doctor. You could also contact the Poison Control Center if you have health-related concerns or questions. And the Poison Control Center can be reached toll-free at 1-800-222-1222.

[Dr. Dooling] What are some precautions people should take when using bug bombs?

[Dr. Calvert] The best precaution is to not have bugs in your home in the first place. So, pests are looking for food, water, and shelter. So if you can deprive these things from pests in your home, you should not have a pest problem. So this means repairing any leaky faucets, repairing any leaky pipes so that you're not providing water to pests. It means having good housekeeping—keeping crumbs off the floor, keeping dirty dishes out of the sink—so that the pests don't have food. And then you want to declutter because pests like to live in cluttered areas, so if you declutter, you can avoid providing shelter to pests. And you also want to control fleas on your cats and dogs which might include having your cats and dogs wear flea collars.

Now, if these things don't work and you need to use bug bombs, it's very important that you read the label. The label provides very useful, helpful instructions, both how to prepare to do a fogging, what to do when you're ready to start the fogging, and what to do after you've performed the fogging. So, in terms of what to do before you start the fogging, you need to cover your food, your utensils, your dishes; you need to insist that your family members and your roommates leave the house; you want to also remove your pets from the house; you want to turn off smoke alarms because the fog is going to activate your smoke alarm; and you also want to put a tag on the doorknob so people who come to the house will see that the house is being fogged. Then, once you're ready to activate the bug bomb, you want to make sure you tilt the bug bomb away from your face so you don't spray yourself in the face. And then, once you activate the bug bomb, you want to leave the home promptly. And you generally want to stay out of the home from two to four hours. Again, read the directions and it will tell you how long you should stay out of the home. And then, when you return, you'll want to completely ventilate your home which means opening the windows, opening the doors, putting fans in the windows, and generally, you want to ventilate your home for at least 30 minutes before you return home for good. And then finally, in terms of storage, you want to make sure you store these bug bombs in an appropriate place to make sure they're kept away from heat, from open fire, and very importantly, kept away from children.

[Dr. Dooling] Where can listeners get more information about safe approaches to pest control?

[Dr. Calvert] The listeners can go to epa.gov and, in the search box, type in *bug bomb*.

[Dr. Dooling] Thanks, Geoff. I've been talking today with Dr. Geoffrey Calvert about the dangers associated with pesticide use, particularly bug bombs.

The most common mistakes included failing to leave the home during the use of bug bombs and returning too soon after application. If you use a fogger, read and follow all instructions.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Kathleen Dooling for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.