

Troops in Iraq fight bugs, parasites

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A parasitic disease transmitted by sand flies has become so common in Iraq that troops call it the "Baghdad boil."

The Boston Globe reported 2,500 U.S. troops have been infected with the disease, leishmaniasis, in the past four years.

The military recommends troops sleep with bed nets, wear uniforms treated with insect repellent, treat exposed skin with the chemical DEET and wear long pants, long-sleeves and socks when outside to avoid the tiny, hopping insects that carry the disease, which often causes a rash. But Army Col. Peter J. Weina of the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research in Silver Spring, Md., learned on a trip to Iraq that some commanders don't follow the recommendations to combat the sand flies and leishmaniasis.

"In some areas, every one had heard about bed nets and about leishmaniasis, but other military units were totally oblivious," Weina told the Globe.

"From the perspective of the person on the ground, they are bombarded with so many concerns. The way the war is going now, getting a little sore that may or may not go away is minor compared to losing your leg," he said.

The disease can be fatal if it strikes the organs, the Globe reported.

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