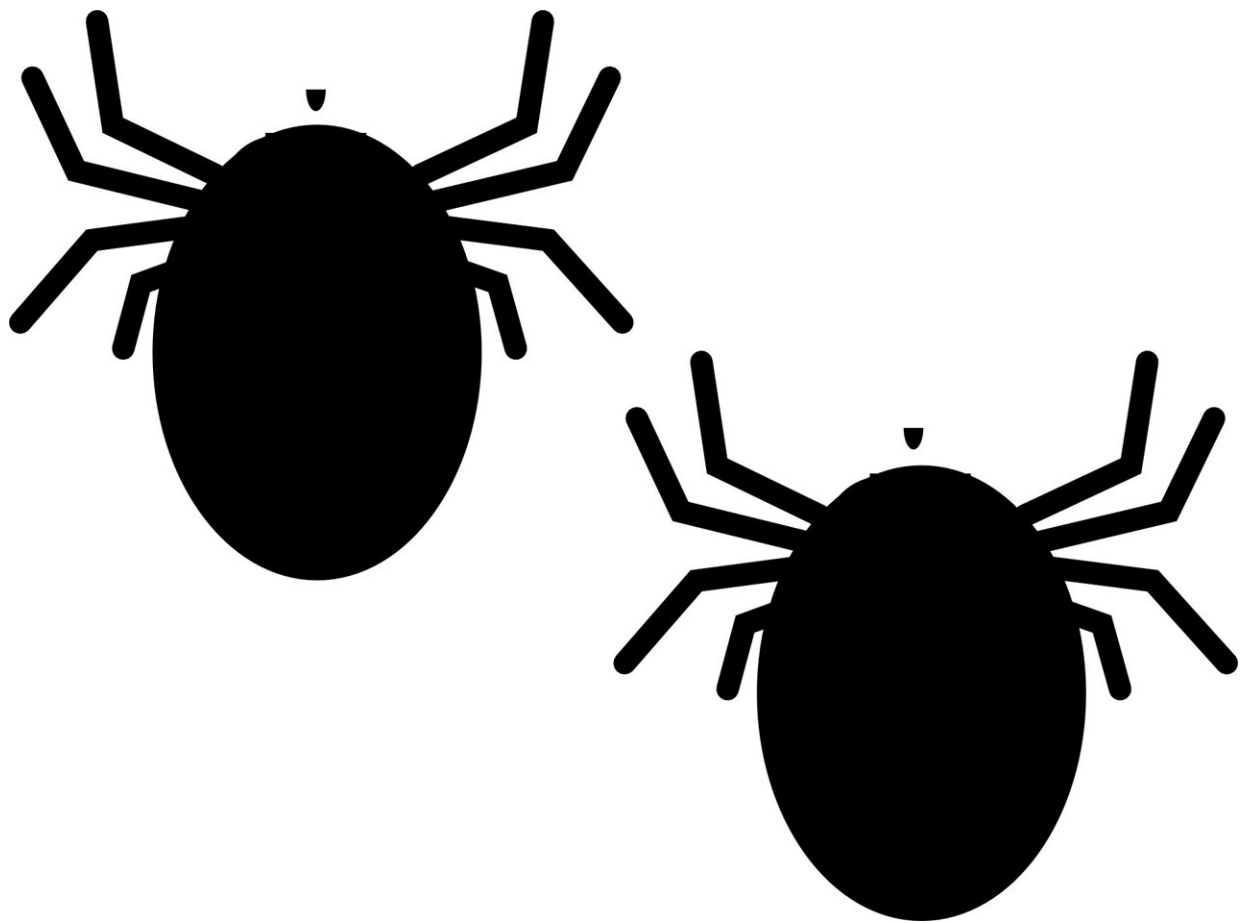


Bedbugs force closure of seven schools in France: minister

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France has been forced to shut seven schools over growing concerns over an infestation of bedbugs, Education Minister Gabriel Attal said Friday.

"Bedbugs were detected at various levels in... I believe 17 institutions, and currently as I speak to you, seven institutions are closed for this reason," Attal told France 5 television.

The French government has held a series of meetings this week to examine surging numbers of reported bedbug cases at a time when France is hosting the Rugby World Cup and preparing to host the Paris 2024 Olympics.

Earlier Friday, the Education Ministry said in statement to AFP that five schools with a total of 1,500 students had been closed.

Earlier this week, authorities announced two schools—one in Marseille and the other in Villefranche-sur-Saone outside Lyon in southeastern France—had been shut down for cleaning.

"We have almost 60,000 institutions and we're only talking about a few dozen here, but it's true that cases are piling up," Attal said. "An immediate response is needed, so that we can have institutions treated within 24 hours."

He said a list of "approved and recognized" companies had been prepared in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and regional health agencies "so that the heads of schools can have the contacts and have them intervene very quickly."

A municipal library in the northern city of Amiens is due to reopen on Saturday after being closed for several days after bedbugs were detected in public reading spaces, the city's mayor Brigitte Foure told AFP.

A sniffer dog found no trace of the pests after the library was treated, she said.

One-tenth of all French households are believed to have had a bedbug problem over the past few years, usually requiring a pest control operation costing several hundred euros which often needs to be repeated.

The blood-sucking insects have been spotted in the Paris metro, high-speed trains and at Paris's Charles De Gaulle Airport.

But the individual cases have not been confirmed by the authorities and RMC TV reported that a probe by Paris transport operator RATP had found no bedbugs on its services.

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