

The KD connection and carpet cleaning

BY ROBERT KRAVITZ*

After a carpet cleaning job, the technicians told the Chicago (US) homeowner the hard surfaces around the just-cleaned carpet might be slippery. In fact, they asked her to initial on the invoice that she had been warned about this.

Some reports in North America and other parts of the world are suggesting that carpet-cleaning technicians might also want to warn their clients about something else: Kawasaki disease (KD). There have been suggestions of a connection between just-cleaned carpets and KD, especially when children are present. In fact, some years ago a report on a major American network (Fox News, April 13, 2006) suggested that carpet cleaning and carpet-cleaning chemicals are responsible for KD.

Of course this set off alarms, concern, and, for carpet cleaners, some unfortunate news coverage. The following information is designed to help carpet-cleaning techs better understand this disease and its connection, or lack thereof, to carpet cleaning.

What is KD?

The Australian Kawasaki Disease Foundation says that KD is an illness affecting about 200 children per year in Australia and many thousands worldwide. It predominantly affects children younger than five.

Children inflicted with the disease usually experience high fevers, rash, swollen glands, unusually red lips and tongue, and swelling and peeling of the hands and feet. However, the most important complication of KD is damage to the coronary arteries that supply blood to the heart; this can affect up to one-third of children if untreated. Even when effective medical treatments are in place, about 5 percent of children develop coronary artery damage, which may lead to problems such as long-term heart disease.

Other things we should know about KD include:

- As unfortunate as the disease is, it is still considered rare; some studies indicate less than 10 children in 100,000 contract KD.
- Most are children younger than five; there are very few cases of KD among adults.
- The disease is more common in Japan, where it was first identified in 1967, and seems to affect boys more than girls.
- There are treatments available for KD and, if treated, few children die of the disease.

The carpet cleaning connection

Researchers in the US state of Colorado were looking into outbreaks of KD and were surprised to find that in 11 of 23 cases, the carpets had recently been cleaned. They also found that most of the cases were reported in April and May, two months when many families in Colorado have their carpets cleaned.

Of course, a report such as this can and did make headlines. Further studies revealed that of the 11 cases discovered, most were in situations where the family had rented a do-it-yourself carpet-cleaning system. In only one case had a professional carpet-cleaning company been hired.

Additional studies poured more cold water on a KD/carpet-cleaning connection. For instance, as mentioned earlier, KD is more common in Japan than many other industrialised countries



However, Japanese homes rarely have carpeting, especially wall-to-wall carpeting. Instead, mats, which are typically not cleaned with carpet-cleaning chemicals or systems, are usually used.

Also, although it is an older work, one of the most conclusive studies of KD was completed by Kempe Research Center, Aurora, Colorado, US, in 1988. Various carpet-cleaning methods were tested, and the researchers concluded, "None of these studies were able to show an association between one single product or carpet-cleaning method and KD."

So if carpet cleaning does not cause KD, what does? Unfortunately, that question has not been answered conclusively. The Australian KD Foundation concludes, "Despite years of focused research to determine the cause [of KD,] the cause is unknown."

What carpet cleaners should do

"The first thing carpet cleaners should do is just know the facts about this disease," says Gary Pelphrey, marketing manager of Powr-Flite, which distributes carpet extractors and other cleaning equipment throughout Australia. "Reliable, credible information is always the best defence [should a customer ask] about KD."

Additionally, he recommends using quality carpet-cleaning chemicals and using them as instructed. As to equipment, especially portable carpet-cleaning extractors, he suggests hot-water extractors that heat the water/cleaning solutions may be preferable in homes when children are present. He also suggests using machines that have multiple-stage vacuum systems and 'robust', as he calls it, psi.

"The higher psi found on professional equipment, such as 500 psi or more, not only improves cleaning performance but better extracts moisture from the carpet. This helps prevent mold and mildew, and

do not develop,” Pelphey points out.

He also suggests carpet cleaners use air movers whenever possible to expedite drying time. In some cases, carpets dry in half the time when air movers are installed.

“And remind customers that clean carpets help protect the health of a home or office,” Pelphey adds. “One study found that total bacteria and bio-pollutants in carpets were reduced by 40 percent when a carpet-cleaning program is in place using professional hot-water extraction systems.”**



Gary Pelphey

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