

VISITING A CLIENT'S HOME: HOW SOCIAL WORKERS, HOME HEALTH AIDES, AND OTHERS CAN PROTECT AGAINST BED BUGS

Healthcare and social workers who routinely visit clients' homes are at risk of transporting bed bugs. Precautions must be taken to prevent transporting bed bugs from clients' homes to the office, car, or home of the social worker or home health aide.

Education

The prevention of the spread of bed bugs begins with education. For professions that require workers to visit clients at home, it is important that employees receive bed bug training. The training can be conducted by the local health department, an entomologist, or a pest management company experienced in bed bug control. The training should include the following topics: identification of live bed bugs, evidence of a bed bug infestation, where bed bugs hide, how to conduct a self-inspection for bed bugs, and proper containment or isolation procedures for infested items.



Although some of the following measures may sound extreme, implementing a strict prevention protocol is the only way to proactively protect from transporting bed bugs.

Preparing for Home Visits

Follow these guidelines to prepare for a client home visit. Before going to a client's home, contact the client, and ask if there have been any insect infestations in the last 2-3 months.

- Wear simple clothes.
- Avoid shirts with buttons and pockets.
- Avoid cargo pants and cuffed pants.
- Wear shoes that can be heated in a clothes dryer.
- Avoid accessories, especially scarves, jewelry, and handbags.
- Carry a supply of sealable plastic bags (such as Ziploc® plastic bags).



While at the client's home, take the following precautions. Be extra diligent if a bed bug infestation has been confirmed at the home.

- Wear protective booties. Inform the client that the booties help protect against potentially having insects transported into the client's home.
- Do not sit on upholstered furniture or on the bed. Inspect the cracks of hard chairs before sitting down. If possible, bring a hard surface chair or plastic stool.
- Carry only essential items into the home. Use a plastic clipboard to hold any paperwork.
- Avoid placing any belongings on upholstered furniture, bedding or against the walls.
- When there is an infestation and the purpose of the visit is to move items or to move the person, wear coveralls or a Tyvec® suit.

Discovering Bed Bugs at a Client's Home or Apartment

If bed bugs are discovered at the client's residence, remain calm. Take the following steps to avoid transporting the bed bugs out of the client's home.

- When returning to the car, remove the booties immediately and seal them in a plastic bag. Dispose of the bag before getting into the car. If the client lives in a multi-unit dwelling, remove the protective gear just outside the client's door. Do not leave the shoe covers on while walking through the building. Place them in a tightly sealed bag and place the bag in an outdoor trash receptacle.
- If coveralls were worn, remove the coveralls by turning them inside out and trapping any bed bugs inside. Put the coveralls in a plastic bag and dispose of the bag before getting into the car.
- Use a hand mirror to inspect yourself for bed bugs. Check clothes, shoe treads, cuffs, and collar.
- If an insect is found, use a wet wipe to capture it. Place it in a Ziploc® bag for identification. Use a second wet wipe to wipe down seams, buttons, and other bed bug hiding places.
- Instruct the client to report the infestation to the landlord and to the local health department.

Repeat Visits at Infested Homes

For repeated visits to a home with a bed bug infestation, make a bed bug containment kit. The bed bug containment kit should include the following:

- Portable, hard surface chair or stool
- Small bag to hold personal items like identification, cell phone, and gloves
- Extra clothes and shoes (to be kept in the car)
- Large plastic storage container with a sealed lid
- Booties
- Coveralls
- Disposable gloves
- Duct tape
- Small plastic garbage bags
- Large plastic garbage bags
- Flashlight
- Wet wipes
- Ziploc® bags
- Plastic clipboard



Transporting Clients Who May Have a Bed Bug Infestation

While transporting a client from a bed bug infested home, take measures to protect the car used. Use large garbage bags to contain the client's personal items and to line the car seats. If the client has a wheelchair that must be transported, use large garbage bags or a small tarp to cover the wheelchair. If the infestation is high, ask the client to wear coveralls while traveling in the car. After the client and the client's belongings have been transported, vacuum the car. Wipe down the seat belts and seat seams with wet wipes to remove any bed bugs.



After Visiting a Client's Home

After a visit to a client's home, return home directly. Take precaution by removing clothes and shoes and placing them in the dryer on high heat for 30 minutes. Heat kills bed bugs in all life stages.

If a bed bug is found, remove the work clothes outside of the home or in the bathroom immediately. Put the clothes and shoes in a separate, sealed or tied bag and keep it separate from the general laundry. Wash the clothes at the highest recommended setting and tumble dry the clothes and shoes for 30 minutes on high heat (120°F or above).

If home visits are frequently made, it is recommended that the employer purchase a clothes dryer in order to heat clothes at the office prior to returning home.

Additional Suggestions

The following additional practices may help avoid transporting bed bugs from a client's home:

- Keep the car clear of clutter; inspect it frequently; vacuum weekly.
- Keep a pair of shoes and a jacket for use only in clients' homes in a sealed container in the car.
- Discourage clients from sharing their vacuum cleaner with neighbors or other residents.
- Discourage clients from accepting clothes, furniture, or other items from friends or neighbors.
- Keep informed about bed bugs in order to offer clients accurate bed bug information.



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