



Bed Bug Action Plan for Home Health Care and Social Workers

Dini M. Miller, Ph.D., Department of Entomology, Virginia Tech
Stephen Kells Ph. D. Department of Entomology, University of Minnesota

Introduction

Bed bugs are spreading rapidly within the United States. Bed bug researchers have observed that bed bug reservoirs are developing among the lower socioeconomic classes due to the cost of control. People who require home visits usually have a long list of economic problems. Bed bugs infestations are just another problem that they cannot afford to deal with. Consequently, if a few bed bugs become established in a low income situation it is very likely that an infestation will develop.

Healthcare and social workers that routinely visit clients' homes as a part of their job are at risk for contacting bed bugs. Service workers need to be bed bug conscious if they are to avoid transporting bed bugs in their cars, taking bed bugs to the office, or even taking bed bugs home with them. Also, service workers must beware of transporting bed bugs from one client to another.

There have already been cases where service employees have refused to enter someone's home because of a bed bug infestation. But what if the person who needs help is elderly or immobilized and dependent on these visits? Bed bugs are obnoxious, and their bites can cause some severe skin reactions, but they are not fatal. Unfortunately, discontinuing home visits can be fatal for someone. So what can be done? How do we protect the service worker from bed bugs if they must enter homes with severe infestations?

First consider that as a home service employee of any kind, bed bugs are in your future. You will have to visit homes with infestations. If you find that unacceptable, or you are so freaked out by bed bugs that you can't stand the sight of one, it might be time to seek a new line of work. However, if home service is your calling the information presented below will help protect you and your clients from bed bug introductions.



Bed Bug Training for all Employees

Contact your local extension agent and ask them who can provide you with an excellent bed bug training program. The agent may recommend a bed bug experienced pest management company, or some other local authority. Once you have located a bed bug expert, schedule a training program for all employees. The training should include the identification of live bed bugs (all life stages), and bed bug evidence (including fecal stains and molted skins). It is essential that the trainer provide color photographs of bed bug evidence inside a home, such as smashed bed bugs on the wall, fecal stains on the wall (see image of bed bug feces having washed down the wall after a resident sprayed the bed bugs with too much insecticide), bed bug eggs on a couch, and bed bug evidence on the bed. Seeing bed bug evidence in place will help your employees to recognize the signs of bed bug infestation in someone's home, even if they do not see live bugs. Keep in mind that a case of bug bombs in the kitchen, or a gallon of insecticide spray sitting in the living or bed room could be signs of an active bed bug infestation.





Other topics that your bed bug training might include are:

- **Where bed bugs can hide**
- **How to inspect yourself for bed bugs**
- **Containment and isolation procedures for infested items**

Preparing for Home Visits

Always wear simple clothing when visiting a client's home. Avoid shirts with buttons and pockets (professional looking, long-sleeved, light colored tee-shirts are advisable). Avoid cargo pants or pants with cuffs. Simple shoes that can be thrown in a hot dryer, and that have minimal tread are also recommended. Do not accessorize with anything, particularly scarves, jewelry or handbags.

It is useful to contact the client prior to the first home visit and ask them if they have had any known insect infestation or pest control treatment within the last 2-3 months. If they answer in the affirmative, ask them specifically about bed bugs. Bringing up the subject of bed bugs to client can be a delicate matter regardless of whether your client is an elderly widow or a retired Marine. Approach the subject in a tactful, matter of fact manner as if bed bugs were the most common thing in the world (which they soon will be). If bed bugs were a problem within the last 12 months you can take precautions to protect yourself and your other clients before arriving at the potentially infested residence.

After you arrive:

- **Wear protective booties at all times or at least when you are uncertain about the presence of an infestation in the client's home. If asked about the booties, let the client know that you are trying to protect them from insects that you may have encountered at other residences.**
- **Coveralls or a Tyvec® suit can be worn if you are entering a home where you know there is a severe infestation. Coveralls should also be considered if you know that you will be moving or carrying items, like a wheelchair from an infested home. Coveralls should also be worn if you are physically moving people or animals from an infested home (see more on transporting infested people below).**
- **Do not sit on upholstered furniture or the bed. Take a quick look in the cracks of hard chairs before sitting down, or better still, bring your own chair when you visit.**
- **Carry only those items with you that are essential to the home visit. Leave everything else in the car. A plastic clipboard can be used to hold your paperwork. A fanny pack can be used to hold your wallet, personal items, spare gloves and booties.**
- **Avoid placing anything on upholstered furniture, bedding, or on carpeted floors.**
- ***If you discover bed bugs in the home during your visit, remain calm!***
 1. Record the infestation in your notes so you will be prepared for the next visit.
 2. When you return to your vehicle, remove your booties immediately and seal them in a plastic bag. Dispose of the bag before you get in the car.
 3. If you were wearing coveralls or a Tyvec® suit remove it by turning it inside out to trap any bed bugs inside. Place the suit in a sealed plastic bag and dispose of it before you get in the vehicle.
 4. Have a hand mirror handy so that you can perform a quick self-inspection. Check your clothing, (the back of your pants, tread of your shoes, shoe laces, socks, cuffs and collar).
 5. If you find an insect on yourself (bed bug or cockroach), don't freak out. Use a "wet wipe" to capture the insect (for later identification). Use another to wipe down the surrounding area, paying attention to seams,

buttons and other bed bug hiding places. Wipe downs are not necessary if you do not find any bugs during your self-inspection.

If You are Repeatedly Visiting Infested Homes

Protect yourself and other clients by always wearing booties and protective coveralls and using a bed bug containment kit. The kit is illustrated below:

- **A portable, hard surface chair or stool.**
- **A fanny pack for holding personal items like your identification, cell phone, additional booties or gloves**
- **A change of clothes and shoes (kept in your vehicle)**
- **A plastic storage container with a sealed lid that is large enough to contain the items listed below or items that you might suspect to be infested.**



- b) Protective booties and Tyvek® type coveralls.
- c) Disposable gloves
- d) A roll of duct tape (light colored)
- e) Small plastic garbage bags
- f) A roll of clear plastic drum liners (50 gallon garbage bags)
- g) Flashlight
- h) Narrow banded spatula (for crushing bed bugs)
- i) A fresh container of wet wipes (i.e. Wet Ones Antibacterial)
- j) Plastic box-type clipboard containing paper and pens.

Transporting Someone Who Had Bed Bugs on their Clothes or Belongings

If you are in the unfortunate situation of having to remove a child from a bed bug infested home, or transporting an infested client for some other reason, you need to contain their belongings to protect your vehicle. Use your drum liners to bag your client's clothes and personal items. Tie the drum liners and seal them in an empty plastic storage container (see illustration) inside your vehicle prior to transport. If you need to transport a potentially infested wheel chair, wrap it in your drum liners before putting it in the car. The wheel chair can be uncovered and used immediately when you arrive at your destination. Drum liners can also be used as seat covers to guard against bed bugs crawling off the client's clothing during transport.

What about bagging the client? This is not a very nice idea, but also not out of the question. Depending on the situation, you may need to transport someone who has obvious bed bugs on their clothing. In this case, you have option of using your Tyvec® suit and booties to cover the client's clothing during transport. However, this will require client cooperation. If your client does not want to wear coveralls, you may have to grin a bear it by just having them sit on the drum liner seat cover. You should then vacuum the vehicle once you have reached your destination. You can also use wet wipes on the seatbelts and seat seams to remove any bed bugs that crawled off of the client.



Use the Dryer When Returning to the Home or Office

Heat is an excellent bed bug killer, and nothing is more effective for killing all bed bug life stages than a hot clothes dryer. Remove your work clothes as soon as you come home. Your clothes, including shoes, can be tumbled in the dryer on high for 30 minutes and emerge bed bug free. A dryer with a removable shelf is excellent for heating items that cannot be tumbled, like backpacks or other supplies. It is also highly recommended that your office purchase a clothes dryer (the same as you would purchase for your home use) so that employees who fear their clothes have been compromised can treat them immediately.



If You have Contacted Bed Bugs

If you think you have been contaminated with bed bugs, notify your supervisor of the source, and return to your home. Remove all clothing before entering the home if possible (or in the bathroom if not). Immediately place your clothing in sealed plastic bags. Get into the shower. After showering, collect your sealed items and place them in the washer with hot soapy water. Place shoes in a hot dryer for 30 minutes. Dry your clothes on high heat.

Additional Suggestions

The following suggestions were gathered from employees and agencies that have successfully served clients with bed bug infestations over the years. These practices may help avoid transporting bed bugs from one client to another or into your own home.

- **Keep your vehicle clear of clutter, vacuum it weekly and inspect it periodically for bed bug presence.**
- **Keep a dedicated pair of shoes for use only in clients' homes or a jacket in sealed plastic containers in your vehicle.**
- **Discourage clients from sharing vacuum cleaners with other residents as this is a potential source of infestation.**
- **Bed bugs are excellent hitchhikers so clients should be discouraged from accepting or borrowing clothing, furniture, or other items from friends and neighbors.**
- **Be prepared to offer your clients basic bed bug information if they ask for it bed bugs do not transmit disease, always hire an pest management professional experienced with bed bugs, don't use bug bombs in your home, etc.).**