

Intake Procedures and Bed Bugs



Clients of homeless shelters and other emergency housing may bring along bed bugs from their previous living arrangements. It is important that intake counselors understand the nature of bed bug issues and express to clients that help is available. **It is in the best interest of a shelter or group home to know whether a client has been exposed to bed bugs.** Helping a client with bed bugs immediately as a preventative approach can reduce risks to other clients and reduce costs associated with eradication if bed bugs become established. Bed bugs are sometimes referred to as chinchies, chintzes, mahogany flats, red coats, and other nicknames.

Intake interviews may not include a category concerning bed bugs but exposure can be incorporated into medical questions, along with other public health pests, such as exposure to lice, scabies, and presence of cockroach allergies or asthma.

Questions should be phrased compassionately. Some suggestions are:

- Have you stayed in a place where you think you may have been exposed to bed bugs in the past three months?
- Has anyone in your family been bitten by bed bugs or do they have bites or blisters that you're concerned about?
- Bed bugs, lice, scabies and other things can cause medical concerns. Do you need help with a bed bug, or any other pest, issue?

If a potential client indicates that they believe they have been exposed to bed bugs or they know they have bed bugs, immediate help is necessary to avoid spreading them within the shelter or home. Help may be in the form of medical attention, laundering clothes, and isolating their belongings while a control strategy is formed.

- In some cases, bites will be evident, but the client may not know or be concerned that they have been exposed to bed bugs.
- If a client refuses to follow procedures for bed bugs, such as inspecting belongings, laundering, or medical attention, a social worker may need to build this into their case plan.
- Do not refuse shelter to clients with symptoms of bed bug infestations.
- Attempt to provide isolated shelter away from the rooms or beds of other clients.
- Provide large plastic bags for personal belongings. Explain that these must remain sealed.
- Provide literature to the individual or family about bed bugs and their management and prevention.
- When placing an individual or family into a shelter, notify your administration of the bed bug issue.
- Respond to bed bug complaints immediately.