



NIOSH **FAST FACTS**

Home Healthcare Workers

How to Prevent Exposure in Unsafe Conditions

Home healthcare workers may encounter unsanitary homes, temperature extremes, homes without water that is safe to drink, or hostile pets.

EMPLOYERS SHOULD

Establish criteria for acceptable home environments, including hygiene, temperature, access to water, and pets. Train employees on the concept of acceptable home environments and what they should do if a home they visit is unsanitary.

EMPLOYEES SHOULD

Follow their employers' guidelines for reporting of unacceptable home environments.

UNSANITARY CONDITIONS

Hygiene may be an issue of concern for home healthcare workers in some client locations. Unsanitary homes may harbor pests such as rodents, lice, bedbugs, or mites. These unsanitary conditions can cause contamination of medical supplies and equipment, as well as spread disease and infection.

If a home is unsanitary:

- Consider using clean pads with plastic on one side to place under equipment and supplies.
- Take in only the necessary equipment and supplies so pests infest fewer things.
- Avoid setting objects such as purses and bags on a carpeted floor or upholstered furniture.
- Consider wearing disposable coveralls.
- Use non-latex disposable gloves and hand sanitizer.

HOME TEMPERATURE EXTREMES

Some clients' homes may be very hot or very cold. If this is the case, take the following steps:

- If you are concerned about the home being too cold and you cannot change the thermostat, ask your employer to contact social service agencies to help the client. Local resources may be available to help pay heating bills.



- If a home is uncomfortably warm, ask for permission from the client to open the windows and use fans. If necessary, apply cool compresses to your neck. Drink plenty of water. If you believe the client is at risk from the heat, ask your employer to contact social service agencies to help the client.

LACK OF WATER

Home healthcare workers may encounter a home with no running water or water that is of poor quality. Homes may use bottled water for drinking and have access to cisterns for flushing and bathing.

- If conditions present a health hazard, ask your employer to contact social service agencies to help the client.
- Use hand sanitizer.

HOSTILE ANIMALS

In some situations, home healthcare workers may be threatened, bitten, or otherwise injured by unrestrained animals.

When facing a threat from an animal:

- Wait outside until the pet is restrained.
- If you see fleas or other pests, discuss appropriate control measures with the client and contact your supervisor.
- If the client isn't receptive to pest control measures, ask your employer to contact social services to help the client and make it possible to work there.

This is one in a series of six fast fact cards developed to provide practical advice for home healthcare workers and is based on *NIOSH Hazard Review: Occupational Hazards in Home Healthcare*, NIOSH Pub No. 2010-125.

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