



PESTS: Zero Tolerance in Health Care Facilities

Health care facilities have a zero-tolerance level for pests in the role of protecting the health of the patients, visitors and staff. Many urban pests pose a number of health threats through the spread of pathogens, and the contamination of food contact surfaces and medical supplies. Some people can be allergic to insects and some stinging insects like wasps can cause serious allergic responses in sensitive individuals.

Pests can be introduced via patients, visitors, employees and product deliveries. They can also enter structures through the smallest of cracks despite the best of building designs. Even though pests may not be preventable, there are some things that will help reduce the likelihood of problems. Understanding the pest and their behavior is one of the steps to take toward prevention.

Common pest species found in health care facilities include: bed bugs, cockroaches and flies. Although chemical treatments and mechanical traps can be used to help battle these pests, experts agree that the most successful pest management programs will use a combination of techniques aimed at prevention, recognition and suppression. The practice of using a variety of tools for pest management is also called integrated pest management or IPM.



Bed Bugs

Bed bugs can be brought into a health care facility by patients, visitors and employees

Facilities which are more residential in nature, such as nursing homes, are prone to infestations becoming established than in hospitals. Both are subject to bed bug introductions but infestations are more common in sites where patients reside on a long-term

basis. Although bed bugs are not typically living on their human host like body or head lice, they will hitchhike on personal belongings including items of clothing, purses, back packs and suitcases. They prefer to feed on their host and then retreat to a harborage such as a wheel chair, bed or personal item. It is important for facility staff to be vigilant in looking for the signs of bed bugs and bed bugs themselves in health care facilities. Early detection can be key in successful treatment.

Bed bugs have not been shown conclusively to transmit any diseases to humans. There are concerns regarding secondary infection from bites and the toll bed bugs can play in affecting sleep as they cause anxiety and stress, but there has been no conclusive disease transmission results. Not all people react to the bites of bed bugs and as we age, our reaction to the bites decreases even more. Therefore, McCloud Services and other pest management companies do not use bites as an indicator of infestation since not all people will be subject to an allergic response.

Just like with disease management, bed bug management is best handled through prevention and early detection. The following precautions are advised for all health care facilities:

- › Train staff to recognize and properly respond to bed bug sightings.
- › Check patients and their belongings during the admittance process. Isolate items which have bed bugs on them by placing items inside sealable plastic bags. If staff is unsure about the identification, collect a specimen and call the pest management firm.
- › Send patient bagged items home with the patient's family if possible.
- › Do not move patients from room to room, if at all possible. This can contribute to the spread of bed bugs.
- › If a piece of furniture, like a waiting room chair, is believed to have bed bugs, place a plastic bag or plastic wrap around it to prevent movement of insects off of the chair. Call the pest management firm.
- › If bed bug introductions are frequent, consider purchasing a small heat treatment chamber for killing bed bugs on personal items brought into the facility. A clothes dryer can also be used.
- › Vacuuming and or steam cleaners can be used to remove and kill bed bugs. If a vacuum is used, the contents of the vacuum should be placed immediately into a sealed bag after use. Steam cleaners designed specifically for bed bug control should be used and only used with proper training.
- › When bed bugs are found in assisted living units or residential units, surrounding units must also be inspected by the pest management professional. Monitoring traps may be used in addition to visual inspections.

German Cockroach



Another pest of health care facilities is the German cockroach. They can be found in almost any area of a hospital but they are most commonly found in the food preparation and service areas of the facility. German cockroaches are often transported on incoming shipments or through personal belongings of patients and employees. German cockroaches prefer areas where there is moisture and warmth.

The bodies of cockroaches are equipped with lots of hairs which are sensory in nature and sticky pads on their feet which aid in climbing. These same hairs and stick pads are capable of picking up and transferring disease organisms as the pest travels. Bacteria associated with food borne illness are associated with the German cockroach. Many people are allergic to cockroaches and the German cockroach is considered the number one trigger for asthma in inner city children.

German cockroaches are omnivorous and will feed on a wide variety of foods. It can be difficult to limit all potential food sources for this insect so a major focus is denying harborage through sealing of cracks and crevices. German cockroaches prefer areas where there is moisture and warmth.

Concentrate on the preferred harborage areas when inspecting for cockroaches and sealing cracks.

- › Inspect incoming shipments to prevent introductions of the pest into the facility. This not only includes food shipments but other items like linens.
- › Remember that German cockroaches can be introduced by employees. Have a dedicated area for employees to keep personal belongings and monitor the area for pests like the German cockroach.
- › Seal cracks and crevices in food service and preparation areas to reduce shelter. The less available harborage, the fewer cockroaches. However, if you can't effectively seal them out of an area, keep the area open to allow for easy inspection and treatment.
- › Minimize the use of corrugated cardboard for long term storage of items. German cockroaches like the corrugations and folds that a cardboard box provides. Cardboard is also not cleanable. It is better to use clear plastic totes or bins with lids. The clear plastic will allow you to see inside and the lid helps prevent pest access.
- › Make sure leaks are repaired promptly as these insects like high humidity and moisture. Decreasing the amount of moisture and water can also be helpful in reducing their ability to survive.
- › Limit clutter. Clutter makes it difficult to inspect areas for pests like cockroaches.

Filth Flies

As a society, we should be more outraged than we are when it comes to flies and our health. The house fly is known to transmit at least 100 diseases. Some of these diseases include dysentery, Salmonella, E. coli and Cholera. They can harbor over one million bacteria on their body and are considered the most dangerous non-biting fly to human health. Like cockroaches, these insects have bodies which are suited for picking up disease organisms. They also spread disease when they regurgitate and defecate on our food. House flies breed on feces and garbage, and move from areas of filth to our food and food preparation surfaces.



Fly control is critical in health care facilities and their management should take priority. Typically, house flies enter from the exterior so exclusion and reduction of attractions are key to their management.

- › Keep doors closed when not in use. Make sure doors are properly sealed around the sides and base.
- › Automatic doors should stay open only long enough for people to safely enter and exit. Check the timing mechanisms for these doors on a regular basis.
- › Keep dumpster and dumpster pads clean. Ask waste haulers to clean dumpsters, especially during the warmer months. If they do not provide this service, make arrangements for facility staff to perform routinely.
- › All exterior trash receptacles should have self-closing lids to decrease accessibility of garbage to flies and to reduce odors emanating from garbage.
- › Make sure vents are properly screened to exclude flies and other insects.
- › Utilize insect light traps on the interior to intercept flies that may have gained access.

Conclusion

A quality pest management program is essential in protecting individuals under the health care facilities care from parasites and pest-related pathogens. Consulting with a pest management professional is advised whether bed bugs, flies or cockroaches are the pest of concern. Control methods and tools will continue to evolve and your pest management professional is equipped to respond to these changes.