

# PLAYING IT **SAFE**

Be safe and healthy on the job at with these helpful tips provided by NSM Insurance Group

## Home Health Care: Preventing Exposure in Unsafe Conditions

*Helpful tips for reducing your risk of exposure at work*

As a home health care worker, you may encounter temperature extremes, unsanitary homes, homes without safe drinking water or even hostile pets. Reduce your risk of exposure by learning to recognize potential hazards and how to properly handle them.

### Unsanitary Conditions

Hygiene may be a source of concern for you in some client locations. Unsanitary homes may harbor pests such as rodents, lice, bedbugs or mites. These conditions can cause contamination of medical supplies and equipment, and can lead to the spread of 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 have fewer of your things to potentially infest.
- Avoid setting objects such as purses or bags on carpeted floor or upholstered furniture. Find a nonupholstered chair or coat rack to hang them on.
- Consider wearing disposable coveralls.
- Use nonlatex disposable gloves and hand sanitizer.

### Extreme Temperatures in the Home

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 the home is uncomfortably warm, ask for permission from the client to open the window 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 services agencies to help the client.

### Lack of Water

You 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.



### Keep Yourself Safe

As a home health care worker, you may encounter potentially hazardous circumstances that are not under your control. Understand how to keep yourself safe from danger or injury so you can stay on the job and continue to help your patients.

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## **Hostile Animals**

In some situations, you 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 for people to work there.

## **Slips, Trips and Falls**

At patients' homes, you do not have control of the walkways and may encounter wet floors, wet carpeting or icy pavement. Loose area rugs and other floor coverings can also be hazardous for workers and patients.

To protect yourself from slips, trips and falls in a patient's home:

- Wear sturdy, flat shoes with good slip protection.
- Walk slowly on icy or wet surfaces.
- Examine the patient's walking paths to the bathrooms, eating areas and sitting areas.
  - Remove or securely tape down rugs using double-sided tape, if the patient gives you permission to do so.
  - Secure cords and any other loose materials in the walking path that could cause the

patient or you to slip, trip or stumble.

- Use handrails.
- Turn on outside lights before returning to your car in the dark.
- Clean up spills as soon as they happen.

