

Top 10 Ways Pests Can Gain Access to Healthcare Facilities

Pests can run, crawl, fly, and hitchhike their way into your facility. Some paths are obvious, like a door that is left open or poorly sealed, and some not so obvious. Here is a list of the ways pests can enter your facility and the methods for preventing entry.

1 Dumpster Compactors

Not only can dumpster compactor chutes provide entry points through poorly sealed chute designs, but the dumpsters themselves can attract pests and serve as breeding sites. If the garbage is merely emptied and not cleaned, fly maggots and other insects can continue to thrive inside the box. If the old dumpster is dropped at the waste disposal site and a new box delivered, pests can come with the recycled dumpster. Monitoring is very important to make sure that rodents or insects are not being transported to the site.

2 Employees

Several urban pests are excellent at hitchhiking, including the German cockroach and the common bed-bug. These pests routinely enter healthcare facilities by arriving on the belongings of employees. Having a separate area for employees to store their belongings is critical. Monitoring these areas for pest activity is also important, as is conducting regularly scheduled employee locker clean-outs.

3 Incoming Shipments

Just like pests can hitchhike on employees, they can hitchhike on food and other materials coming to the building. A good inspection of incoming goods is required to make sure that hitchhikers, like rodents, cockroaches, and pests hiding in stored products, are excluded. Once the product has been accepted

into the site, it can be difficult to establish responsibility for the pest infestation. Even small flies can be brought into the site on items like fresh fruits and vegetables.

4 Negative Building Pressure

One of the most expensive structural deficiencies to correct is a negative pressure situation, as it can be responsible for bringing a wide variety of insects into a structure. Negative pressure can pull insects into a building whether they want to come inside or not. Insect-attractive lighting, building temperatures, and food odors emanating from the structure can add to the complexity of the issue.

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5 Improperly Functioning Automatic Doors

Automatic doors are often used in healthcare facilities to allow easy access for patients. However, doors that are not regularly checked for proper operation may stay open longer than necessary or may stick open. Doors should be inspected for proper operation and timing to avoid pest entry.

6 Improperly Functioning Air Doors and Curtains

Air curtains can provide a false sense of security when it comes to preventing pest entry if the right air door is not selected and maintained. Over time, these doors may not function as well as when they were originally installed—or they may not have been installed correctly in the first place. An improperly functioning or installed air curtain can do more damage than no air curtain by pulling insects into the building. The proper air stream should be 2–5 inches wide at the nozzle and a minimum air velocity of 1,600 fpm of air, 3 feet above the floor and across the entire span of the door opening. The air flow should be directed toward the exterior of the building for maximum effectiveness.

7 Dock Plates

Because of the nature of a dock plate, there can be gaps allowing it to move. This also permits pest entry. Special care is needed to ensure a proper seal where the dock plate seal meets the door seal. Dock plate wells should be inspected regularly for product spillage and pest evidence. The best dock systems consist of a plate that is lowered from an upright position into a trailer.



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Floor Drains

Sewer systems can provide an ideal harbor-age for pests like small flies, cockroaches, and rats, which then travel into facilities. Drains that are seldom used for water management can be particularly problematic. Maintaining drains through cleaning and proper grating is essential to keep pests from migrating into structures through sewer highways. If a drain is not needed for waste water management, consider capping it. If it is needed and is supporting pest entry, consider using special caps or screened “socks” that will allow liquids to flow down the drain but help keep pests out.

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Landscaping Materials

Mulch, plants, and landscaping timbers can all be sources of pests. Insects like ants may

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arrive in mulch, and even pests like cockroaches may arrive with plant materials. This can be of particular concern if the materials are used in an indoor atrium or planters. Mulch in general can encourage pest activity due to the organic material and moisture retention properties. Rock is a preferred material, especially when used close to the structure.

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Patients and Visitors

Unfortunately, pests can be brought into a facility on a patient or individuals visiting a patient. Sometimes the introduction is due to patient healthcare needs as in the case of ectoparasites, like body or head lice. Other times, bedbugs can be brought in on the personal belongings of patients. Healthcare facilities should have a program in place to prepare for these introductions, with staff education as a critical component of the plan. ★

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