

Health and Safety Equipment

Every team should have a health and safety kit they carry with them on every investigation containing the following items.

- **CPR pocket mask** – Hopefully you'll never need to use this item, but in case someone needs CPR, several team members should be certified to administer it.
- **Disposable N95 respirator masks** – These are inexpensive but you should always wear them in areas where there is mold, heavy dust, or evidence of animal excrement.
- **Emergency blanket** – These little mylar blankets may not look like much, but if a team member is injured and goes into shock they are better than nothing.
- **Polysporin antibiotic cream** – Apply to simple wounds or put on existing sores and scabs before an investigations, as well as new ones that show up during the investigation.
- **Bandages** – Adhesive bandages (all sizes), adhesive tape, nonadhesive pads (Telfa), and 4" x 4" sterile gauze pads are essential for wound care.
- **Anesthetic spray or lotion like Bactine or Calamine** – Use these for rashes and insect bites.
- **2", 3", and 4" Ace bandages** – Use these for sprains or strains, as well as for wrapping gauze on to wounds or securing splints.
- **Benadryl** – Use this oral antihistamine for allergic reactions and itchy rashes.
- **Exam gloves** – Use for infection protection. They can also be made into ice packs if filled with water and frozen.
- **Safety pins (large and small)** – You need these for splints and ace bandages.
- **Scissors** – Use these to cut tape and bandages.
- **Tweezers** – Use for splinter, stinger, or tick removal.
- **Trash bags** – These are good for a variety of things, such as making ice packs or covering a large wound.
- **Hand sanitizer** – Use this often to protect against fungal, bacterial and viral infections.
- **Carbon monoxide detector** – Place these near furnaces and stoves to prevent accidental poisoning.
- **Painter's masking tape or caution tape** – Use to mark off dangerous areas.

Diseases and Infections

- **Histoplasmosis** causes fever and chest pains. Untreated, histoplasmosis can turn into a chronic lung disease resembling tuberculosis. The disease can be fatal in people with a compromised immune system. Ocular histoplasmosis syndrome, which destroys the central (not peripheral) vision, can also develop. While lung problems can be cured with anti-fungal medications, the ocular disease has no cure.
- **Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome** can occur by breathing in dust that is contaminated with rodent urine or droppings, direct contact with rodents or their urine and droppings, or bite wounds. Early symptoms typically appear nine to 33 days after exposure. Symptoms, which occur in anyone infected, include fatigue and fever. Muscle aches, particularly in the large muscle groups—thighs, hips, back, and sometimes shoulders – are also present. Four to 10 days after the onset of the initial symptoms, additional symptoms set in including coughing and shortness of breath as the lungs fill with fluid.

More Diseases and Infections

- **Leptospirosis** is a bacterial infection usually caused from eating food or drinking water contaminated with urine from infected animals. It can also be contacted via the skin or mucous membranes (such as inside the nose) with water or soil that is contaminated with the urine from infected animals. Symptoms usually appear after a four to 14-day incubation period and include high fever, severe headache, chills, muscle aches, and vomiting. Additional symptoms may include jaundice, red eyes, abdominal pain, diarrhea, and rash. The symptoms may grow more severe if you don't seek early medical treatment.
 - **Lymphocytic Chorio-Meningitis (LCM)** is a virus contracted by breathing in dust that is contaminated with rodent urine or droppings, direct contact with rodents or their urine and droppings, or being bitten by a rodent. Onset of symptoms usually occurs eight to 13 days after exposure. Symptoms include fever, malaise, lack of appetite, muscle aches, headache, nausea, and vomiting. This infection is rarely fatal but can cause serious complications if not treated.
 - **Plague** is an infectious disease of animals and humans caused by *Yersinia pestis* (*Y. pestis*) bacteria. The disease is uncommon and can be treated with antibiotics but it can be fatal. The symptoms include fever, headache, weakness, and a bloody or watery cough due to infection of the lungs (pneumonia). It spreads by being bitten by an infected flea or having direct contact with infected animal.
 - **Rat-Bite Fever** typically is caused by a bite or scratch wound from an infected rodent, contact with a dead rodent, as well as eating or drinking food or water that is contaminated by rat feces. There are actually two types of Rat-Bite Fever known as RBF: streptobacillary RBF and spirillary RBF.
 - The streptobacillary RBF symptoms most often appear three to 10 days after exposure but sometimes can take 21 days. Symptoms include fever, vomiting, headache, muscle pain, joint pain, and rash. A maculopapular rash with red patches and small bumps may appear two to four days after the onset of the fever and joints may be swollen and painful.
 - The signs of spirillary RBF occur seven to 21 days after exposure and consist of fever (that may occur repeatedly), swelling near the wound, swollen lymph nodes, and rash.
- In most cases simple antibiotics can treat rat bite fever if treated early. Left untreated it can have deadly complications like endocarditis, myocarditis, or pericarditis, meningitis, pneumonia and abscesses in internal organs.
- **Murine Typhus & Epidemic Typhus** are both bacterial infections. Murine Typhus most often is related to some type of rodent exposure and is more prevalent in California and Texas during the summer and fall. However, it has been seen throughout most of the lower 48 states. A lice bite is most often the cause for Epidemic Typhus, and only a couple of cases are reported in the US each year. Symptoms for both include headache, fever, muscle pain, joint pain, nausea, and vomiting. About half of infected people will develop a discrete rash six days after the onset of signs, as well as neurological symptoms such as confusion, stupor, seizures, or imbalance.
 - Treatment for Murine Typhus is antibiotics; however, a large number of cases in California have required hospitalization. Death from Murine Typhus is rare - about two to four percent without treatment.
 - Epidemic Typhus is treated with antibiotics. Close to 90 percent of the cases require hospitalization to stabilize the patient. The mortality rate is 10 to 60 percent. If the patient seeks treatment early, the mortality rate is significantly lower.
 - **Rickettsialpox** is a bacterium originally found in mice caused when mites feeding on mice become affected. The disease is transmitted to humans when an infected mite bites them. Many of the symptoms are flu-like and include fever, chills, weakness, and achy muscles. The most distinctive symptom is the rash that breaks out, usually beginning with a bump formed by the bite that eventually results in a black, crusty scab. The rash spreads over time, spanning the infected person's entire body. Even untreated, rickettsialpox usually will resolve itself in two to three weeks. Treated, the symptoms often resolve within 72 hours.

Safety Tips for Paranormal Investigators

*Paranormal investigators
-- in particular "ghost hunters" --
often fail to recognize the dangers in front of them. The
purpose of this handout is to educate investigators so
they can remain safe in the field.*



This pamphlet was created by Elaine Davison, a paranormal investigator under the guidance of a physician using information provided by doctors, health departments and the Center for Disease Control.

This does not cover every disease, infection or hazard investigators may encounter. It does provide some information on some of the most probable circumstances and tips to lessen the risk of illness and injury.

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General Guidelines for Staying Healthy

- **People with a cold or otherwise comprised immune system should not investigate.** Stay home and rest. The team and clients don't want to get sick either.
- **Drink plenty of water.** Investigating can be intense, so your body will produce more cortisol in response to the stress. Cortisol is a stress hormone that causes increased heart rate and respiration, as well as weakening the immune system. When you do not drink enough water during a paranormal investigation, you may experience a "hangover" the day after the investigation due to this increase in cortisol. A good rule of thumb is to drink four to six ounces of water for every hour of investigating. If you actually get thirsty while investigating, double this amount.
- **Get your shots.**
 - Getting a flu shot will reduce the likelihood of getting influenza or a cold. Even if you do contract the flu, studies show the influenza vaccine can lessen the severity and duration.
 - Keep your DTP (diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus) shot up-to-date, as well. Whooping cough has reached the highest incident rates since the 1960s, and it can be very dangerous, particularly in people with weakened immune systems.
- **Use a hand sanitizer with alcohol every hour.** This will greatly reduce your risk of growing ill after an investigation. Investigators often don't know who may have been at a location before them or what, if any, illnesses they may have had. Using sanitizer could ward off a nasty illness. Alcohol will kill bacteria and fungi both by breaking down (denaturing) the cell's processes.
- **Cover open sores** and those already scabbed over with an antibacterial ointment and a bandage.
- **Immediately remove and wash your clothes and shower after an investigation.** You can't be certain what fungi, virus or bacteria came home with you on your clothes/skin.
- **In areas where mold, dust and animal waste might be an issue, use a disposable N95 respirator** (10 packs are about \$15 at most home supply stores). In addition to the N95 designation, the mask must fit well so contaminated air can't seep around the edges. Wearing a mask in these areas will reduce the chances of contracting a respiratory infection by 90 to 95%.
- **Take along a carbon monoxide detector.** Not all homes have them or place them where they are most needed. Place detectors near any stoves or furnaces. CO emissions can sometimes rise quickly. When you are investigating, you need something to warn you there is a colorless, odorless gas about.

Environmental Dangers

- **People dangers** – While many clients are of sound mind, others may be schizophrenic or have some other mental disorder. Living people can be more terrifying than any spirit you encounter. Check out the client prior to showing up for a pre-investigation. A quick Internet search of the address and contact person can sometimes be enlightening. Never go alone to someone's home, EVER!
- **Structural hazards** – There are documented cases of people falling through ceilings of older homes during investigations. Always do a walkthrough in the light and treat all floors as if they could collapse until proven safe. If an area is questionable, mark it off before turning off the lights by stringing painter tape at chest height.

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Despite some skeptics believing all paranormal investigators are mentally ill, it is not the case. However, there are a small percentage of people who are mentally ill and seek refuge in the paranormal community. They may also contact teams to validate themselves.

Some of these people may suffer from histrionic personality disorder (HPD), a group of mental illnesses where the individual needs to draw attention to him/herself. People with HPD often behave in overly emotional and dramatic ways to gain attention. Munchausen Syndrome falls into this classification of illness. Often people with these issues are only a danger to themselves. However, if a person with HPD doesn't receive the attention he or she desires, he/she may engage in behaviors that put other investigators in danger in order to play the part of a hero to gain the craved attention.

Team members also may become obsessed with the paranormal. This most often occurs with Intrusive Obsession Disorder. People with this affliction start dropping everything to pursue their addiction. Often, these people destroy family ties, lose jobs and friendships, suddenly show signs of reckless behavior, become reclusive, and may have changes in their personality. Much like an alcoholic or a drug addict, people with mental disorders need help to overcome their issues.

- **Electrical hazards** – Every year, hundreds of people are killed in homes by electrocution. If there is a low-hanging wire, test it with a voltmeter or multimeter before touching. Assume all wires are live until proven otherwise. Metal is an excellent electrical conductor, so be careful around vents and pipes, as well. If a live wire is touching them, then they are likely to carry a charge that can hurt you.
- **Electromagnetic fields** – Governmental agencies differ on the safe level for EMF exposure. Some agencies even believe there is no danger from EMF fields; however, other agencies disagree and cite problems associated with EMF that include mental and physical health issues. Safe levels of EMF are hotly debated in the scientific field, so it's best to err on the side of caution. Some studies show exposure to levels of over 1 mG for more than an hour may cause digestive tract issues. These studies concluded that if you are entering an area with potentially high EMF, you should limit food intake for four hours before exposure and two hours after. Visit the World Health Organization's website for more information. http://www.who.int/peh-emf/publications/risk_hand/en/index.html.
- **Mold** – You can find mold everywhere – both indoors and outside -- but it thrives mostly in damp environments. There are thousands of strains of mold, which are broken down into tens of thousands of sub classes. You can identify mold by its fuzzy appearance, which can be orange, green, black, brown, pink or purple. Most people do not experience any health effects from mold exposure. However, some molds can cause nasal stuffiness, eye irritation, throat irritation, and coughing or wheezing. People with mold allergies may have more severe reactions. Immune-compromised people and those with asthma may get serious infections in their lungs when they are exposed to mold. Sometimes, even seemingly healthy people come down with respiratory infections after mold exposure.
- **Mildew** – There are two main types of mildew. Downy mildew starts as yellow spots, and then the color changes to brown. Powdery mildew is whitish in color and looks like talcum powder. Inhaling mildew can cause coughing, headache, scratchy throat and lung problems. Mildew can also start growing in lungs and cause other serious issues.
- **Carbon monoxide** – Often referred to as a silent killer, carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless gas produced by cars and trucks, small gasoline engines, stoves, lanterns, burning charcoal and wood, gas ranges, and heating systems. Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion. High levels of CO inhalation can cause loss of consciousness and death.
- **Fiberglass insulation** – Casual exposure to fiberglass is not a huge concern unless it is being moved or installed. However, in attics and under homes, you should wear a N95 disposable respirator where fiberglass insulation is present to avoid a potential lung infection.
- **Asbestos** – Investigating in areas with asbestos is dangerous because exposure can cause serious lung damage and cancers. In areas where asbestos is not contained, the only protection from danger is a respirator equipped with HEPA filtered cartridges (color coded purple) or an N-100, P-100 or R-100 NIOSH rating. These cartridges are specific for filtering out asbestos fibers. A N95 disposable respirator paper mask is not adequate. You should always ask potential clients about the presence of asbestos before an investigation.

Critter Dangers

- **Bats and birds** – Bat guano and bird droppings often grow a fungus that releases spores into the air. These spores can cause histoplasmosis in humans. Bats are known for carrying rabies, as well. However, this is only a concern if they bite you.
- **Raccoons** – Raccoons like to create nests in sheltered warm places where they can feel safe. This makes attics, chimneys, and foundations likely places where paranormal investigators may encounter them. Not only will a raccoon bite or scratch if they feel threatened or trapped, but they can carry rabies, leptospirosis, and parasites that can be transmitted directly to humans.
- **Mice and rats** – These little creatures are known to spread more than 35 different diseases throughout the world. Only a few are known to exist in the United States, but several of these diseases can be life threatening. Illnesses associated with mice and rats include histoplasmosis, hantavirus, pulmonary syndrome, leptospirosis, lymphocytic chorio-meningitis (LCM), plague, rat bite fever, murine typhus, and rickettsialpox.
- **Opossums** – These marsupials typically avoid humans unless they are ill with the plague or rabies. They also carry diseases such as leptospirosis, tuberculosis, relapsing fever, tularemia, spotted fever, toxoplasmosis, coccidiosis, trichomoniasis, and Chagas disease.
- **Skunks** – These animals prefer to make their dens under homes, porches and decks. Their presence is often noted by their aromatic scent. They carry rabies, leptospirosis, listeriosis, canine distemper, canine hepatitis, Q-fever, tularemia, and trypanosoma.
- **Spiders** – There are over 3,500 types of spiders. Only two types have the potential to inflict a single fatal bite: Latrodectus (a.k.a. the widows; black, brown and red) and Loxosceles (brown recluse). The bites from the Tegenaria (hobo spider) are not known to be fatal to humans, but substantial envenomation can cause prolonged systemic effects that can lead to death if untreated. Most spiders are venomous; however, except for those listed above they generally only cause a mild irritation. Multiple bites from any spider, on the other hand, can cause a variety of health issues.
- **Snakes** – Five to eight thousand people in the United States are bitten by venomous snakes each year. On average, only five die from the bite because most seek out immediate medical care. The venomous snakes indigenous to the US are rattlesnakes, copperheads, cottonmouths/water moccasins, and coral snakes. Even non-venomous snakes can cause a reaction if the person bit is allergic to the snake's bite.