Background

- Body lice (Pediculus humanus corporis) are spread by close physical contact or by sharing clothes and bedding
- *Bartonella quintana*
  - Fastidious gram-negative bacteria
  - Transmitted by infected body lice bites
  - Can cause chronic bacteremia and culture-negative endocarditis
  - In the U.S., infection occurs almost exclusively in people experiencing homelessness (PEH)
  - Recent outbreaks have occurred among PEH, including in Denver, CO

Methods

- Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) invited organizations serving PEH to participate
- Organizations identified staff or volunteers with regular client interaction
- 1 - 5 staff completed a 20-minute, in-person, standardized survey on knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding body lice prevention and treatment
- 1 senior staff member completed a site-level standardized assessment of policies and resources
- Descriptive analysis was conducted to identify knowledge gaps, barriers to implementing control measures, and preferred education modalities

Results

- 57% of workers agreed that body lice are a problem for PEH
- 20% of workers agreed that *B. quintana* is a problem for PEH
- 70% of outreach workers correctly identified body lice by photograph
- 92% of outreach workers correctly answered “true”

What happens at this shelter when a client is found to have body lice?

- 6 out of 26 shelter workers were able to recall shelter protocols appropriate for lice management:

  - Common misconceptions among shelter workers:
    - “Ask them to leave the shelter”
    - “Get rid of everything”
    - “Need documentation of treatment to re-enter”
    - “Hats and everyone will get it”
    - “Wipe down and use your hands”
    - “Everyone in the dorm must leave for pest control”

Conclusions

- Most front-line service workers:
  - Correctly identified body lice
  - Correctly identified methods of body lice transmission
  - Had limited knowledge of body lice management protocols
  - Had limited knowledge and concern about *B. quintana* infection in PEH
- PEH in shelters reportedly had regular access to and used hot showers and laundry; unsheltered PEH did not

Implications

- Education about body lice and *B. quintana* is needed for front-line service workers in homeless shelters and street outreach organizations in Colorado
- Should focus on prevention, recognition, and management of body lice infestations
- Communities should ensure that unsheltered PEH have consistent, easy access to shower and laundry facilities to prevent louse-borne diseases