

Introduction

Each year, 10 to 15 million people seek political asylum or become refugees in various parts of the world. Most of these displaced persons are from developing countries where infectious diseases (e.g., tuberculosis, hepatitis, malaria, and various parasitic and emerging diseases) are prevalent. Based on national quotas, these persons are offered refuge in many countries with most going to the United States, Australia, and Canada. Since the mid 1990's refugees have been arriving to Minnesota in record numbers.

When refugees arrive they have unique health-care needs. Fleeing persecution and conflict in their homeland, newly arrived refugees may have received little or no medical care for prolonged periods prior to resettlement. Often, they arrive from camp living situations in which malnutrition and illness due to crowding and deficient sanitation were rampant. A large proportion of Minnesota's refugees come from sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia – areas of the world that are endemic for certain infectious diseases such as malaria or hepatitis B.

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) Refugee Health Program, in collaboration with local health departments and private healthcare providers, oversees administration of the domestic refugee health assessment and follow-up process. The objectives of this process are to identify and treat health problems which may interfere with the refugee's resettlement, including the ability to obtain employment, attend classes, and/or network with the healthcare system. MDH encourages all refugees to have a comprehensive health screening performed within 90 days of arrival to the state. The health assessment protects the health of Minnesota's public through communicable disease diagnosis and treatment. A secondary benefit of this organized statewide screening process is the collection of data that can be used to predict future trends in communicable disease, set policy, and offer increased services, if indicated.



How to Use this Guide

The Minnesota Refugee Health Provider Guide is intended to inform healthcare providers of the unique healthcare needs of refugees and the essential components of the Minnesota Initial Refugee Health Assessment exam. Although much of the information presented in this guide is clinical in nature, anyone who helps perform the health screening could benefit from reviewing its contents – from physicians to nurse practitioners to individuals working in medical records and scheduling.

The manual is designed to be a reference document. It offers specific guidance to the provider on the recommended components of the Minnesota Initial Refugee Health Assessment examination. Each component of the exam has its own chapter in the manual. Included in this you will find particular information on:

- Rationale for the initial refugee health screening exam
- Screening and treatment protocols for tuberculosis infection
- Detecting and treating intestinal parasitic infections
- Immunization schedules for children and adults
- Screening for hepatitis B
- Screening for malaria in populations from highly endemic areas
- Refugee mental health
- Working with medical interpreters

Within each chapter is a one-page summary, including:

- A copy of the language used on the assessment form regarding that health condition
- Guidelines for assessing a newly arrived refugee for the health condition
- Facts regarding the incidence of that health condition in newly arrived refugees screened in Minnesota

This manual also contains material to help the provider build a stronger partnership with his or her refugee patients and better understand the unique needs of these patients. This material is included in the chapters, “Working with Interpreters” and “Refugee Mental Health.”

Many of the chapters in this manual contain an appendix of supplementary materials, including sample forms, journal articles, and reference materials. Resources such as helpful web sites and hotline numbers are also listed under each chapter. These materials are called out in the table of contents and at the end of each chapter. Finally, the manual contains a detailed glossary that defines the terms associated with the Refugee Health Program.

You may choose to read through the entire guide from beginning to end or you can use it as a reference tool, selectively looking up topics that you have questions about. We hope that you find the Minnesota Refugee Health Provider Guide to be a valuable resource in your screening efforts!

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To obtain a copy of the Minnesota Initial Refugee Health Assessment, call the Minnesota Department of Health Refugee Health Program at 651-201-5414.

Any and all pages within this guide may be reproduced.

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