



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE**

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Commissioner

April 11, 2023

Dear Colleague:

More than 50,000 people have come to New York City (NYC) in the past year shortly after crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. As more people arrive and many make NYC their home, the scale and scope of need continues to grow. I wrote in September 2022 with a call to collaborate in helping the newest New Yorkers. I am writing now to underscore how critical it is that health care providers take a wide range of considerations into account when working with people who are seeking asylum. This letter builds off the previous version; updates prior recommendations based on our collective experience over the past year; and includes new sections on school health requirements, varicella, immigration legal services support, and several additional recommended screening and referral pathways. The scope of this letter represents the scale of the need. It is incumbent upon us as a welcoming city to comprehensively evaluate and meet these needs.

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Health Insurance

Everyone should be offered a screening for health insurance eligibility if they have not previously received one. In New York State (NYS), children age 18 and younger are eligible for Child Health Plus, a public health insurance program, regardless of immigration status. Pregnant people are eligible for Medicaid, regardless of immigration status. Since some adults recently arrived in NYC have been paroled into the country or are otherwise recognized by federal immigration authorities, they may qualify for full public health insurance. Others will, at minimum, qualify for Emergency Medicaid, which pays medical costs in an emergency. More information on Emergency Medicaid is available [here](#).

Accessing government-paid health care outside of a residential long-term care facility will not affect anyone's immigration status or application.

- Staff from the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC Health Department) can help assess eligibility and assist with enrollment. For more information, visit the NYC Health Department's **Health Insurance webpage**.
- For answers to frequently asked questions about health care services for immigrant New Yorkers, see **Receiving Health Care Services in New York City, Regardless of Immigration Status: Frequently Asked Questions for Immigrant New Yorkers**.
 - To find this material in additional languages, visit nyc.gov/health/healthcoverage and look under **Additional Resources** toward the bottom of the webpage.

Immunizations

Vaccination rates for certain diseases are low in some of the most common countries of origin, with rates hovering around 50% for polio as an example. Ask your patients for their immunization records but anticipate they may not be available. If your patients have a vaccine record from their country of origin, be sure to enter the historical doses into the Citywide Immunization Registry (CIR). Dates are likely to be recorded as day/month/year format and will need to be converted to month/day/year format for entry into the CIR. Children should be screened and vaccinated urgently with all needed recommended immunizations, including those **required for school attendance**. Both influenza and COVID-19 vaccination should be offered to everyone age 6 months and older.

Children who are due for their measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine and varicella-containing vaccine (live, attenuated vaccines) should receive both at the same time. Otherwise, live, attenuated vaccines need to be spaced 28 days apart, resulting in delayed protection and delays with meeting school requirements.

History of varicella disease and results of serology testing for measles, mumps, rubella, hepatitis B and varicella should also be entered into the CIR and can be used to meet school immunization requirements. For questions about the CIR, contact cir@health.nyc.gov or 347-396-2400.

See these additional web resources:

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) **catch-up immunization schedule** for children from newborn to age 18 (see the **School Health Requirements section** in this letter for information on immunization requirements)
- The CDC's **adult immunization schedule**

Varicella

An outbreak of varicella is occurring among families who recently arrived and are residing in shelters and other facilities in NYC. Most cases have been among unvaccinated children, but cases have also occurred among young adults. For details on varicella clinical presentation, testing, post-exposure prophylaxis for household members and other contacts, and treatment, see **Varicella Guidance for Providers**.

Vaccinate children and adults with no or an unknown history of varicella or vaccination urgently. Individual cases of varicella do not routinely need to be reported to the NYC Health Department. However, as part of this outbreak, varicella cases in shelters should be reported to the NYC Health Department's Provider Access Line at 866-692-3641.

Tuberculosis (TB)

Many people who recently arrived in NYC have lived in or traveled through countries with high rates of TB. Assess all people who have not been screened since arriving to NYC for symptoms of active TB disease using these questions:

- Have you had a cough for more than two weeks? If yes, have you noticed any blood when coughing?
- Have you had fever or night sweats?
- Have you had unexplained weight loss?

People with symptoms of active TB disease should be promptly evaluated. TB services at the NYC Health Department's **Chest Centers**, including testing, chest X-rays, sputum induction and treatment, are provided at no cost to patients, regardless of their immigration status.

Health care providers should also assess all immigrants who recently arrived in the U.S. for latent TB infection. Use a blood-based interferon-gamma release assay (IGRA) test for TB infection in people age 2 and older. IGRA test results are not affected by past receipt of the Bacille Calmette-Guérin (BCG) vaccine for TB, which is commonly given outside the U.S. People with known exposure to TB and people who recently arrived from Ukraine, the U.S.-Mexico border or countries with high rates of TB can be referred to an NYC Health Department Chest Center if needed for TB testing and evaluation.

- To refer a patient to an NYC Health Department Chest Center, call 844-713-0560, **311** or a **Chest Center location** directly.
- To get expert medical consultation about TB and latent TB infection or to report suspected or confirmed TB cases, call the TB Provider Hotline at 844-713-0559.
- For information on the diagnosis and management of TB disease, see the **Tuberculosis: Clinical Policies and Program Manual**.
- For information on the diagnosis and management of latent TB infection, see the **City Health Information report**.
- For more information about TB and TB-related resources, visit the NYC Health Department's **TB webpage**.

COVID-19

COVID-19 continues to circulate in NYC. Make sure people are up to date with their COVID-19 vaccines. Some people may have received initial COVID-19 vaccinations at the U.S.-Mexico border but may not have received additional immunizations in the U.S. Offer or refer people with COVID-19 symptoms or a recent exposure for testing. Many sites offer no-cost testing regardless of immigration status. Prescribe or refer patients with COVID-19 for treatment.

- To learn more about COVID-19 testing, visit the NYC Health Department's **COVID-19: Testing webpage**.
- For resources to share with patients when they are sick with COVID-19, visit the NYC Health Department's **COVID-19: When You Are Sick webpage**.
- To learn more about prescribing treatment for COVID-19, visit the CDC's **Interim Clinical Considerations for COVID-19 Treatment in Outpatients webpage**.
- Everyone, regardless of immigration status, can access COVID-19 treatment through NYC Health + Hospital's (H+H) Test to Treat mobile sites or by calling 212-COVID-19 (212-268-4319). For more information, visit H+H's **Treatment for COVID-19 in NYC webpage**.

Sexual and Reproductive Health

Health care providers should evaluate the sexual and reproductive health of people who recently arrived from the U.S.-Mexico border and provide or refer them to the services and programming they need.

Health care providers should take a comprehensive sexual history. The **GOALS Framework for Sexual History Taking in Primary Care Settings** is designed to streamline sexual history conversations and elicit information most useful for identifying an appropriate clinical course of action. Health care providers can visit NYC Health Department webpages for information and resources on:

- **HIV testing**
- **HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and emergency post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP)**
- **HIV Undetectable = Untransmittable (U = U)**
- **Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)**, including testing and treatment
- **Sexual and reproductive health**, including contraception and pregnancy
- **Abortion**

The NYC Health Department's Sexual Health Clinics and telemedicine hotline offer no-cost and low-cost services for STIs (including HIV), abortion care and contraception services for people age 12 and older, regardless of immigration status. Parental or guardian consent is not required.

- The telemedicine hotline is available at 347-396-7959, Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
- For more information on the Sexual Health Clinics and telemedicine hotline, including services, locations and hours, visit the NYC Health Department's **Sexual Health Clinics webpage**. Share this **flyer** with a summary of services and locations with patients (available in multiple languages on the Sexual Health Clinics webpage).
- To find an STI testing site or a provider who offers PrEP, emergency PEP, HIV treatment or sexual health services in NYC, visit the **NYC Health Map** and select the type of service needed.

Maternal and Infant Health

Pregnant and birthing people who are seeking asylum and refugee status face barriers to needed prenatal care and postpartum support. Late entry or lack of prenatal care puts pregnant and birthing people at risk for maternal mortality and complications during birth. Additionally, pregnant and birthing people, people who are lactating, infants, and young children have specific needs that must be considered while preparing to provide and providing support during and after an emergency. These include access to supplies such as diapers, breastfeeding support and assistance navigating the health care system for children.

- All pregnant people should be connected to **Prenatal Care**, regardless of gestational age.
- First-time pregnant people in their first and second trimesters can be referred to **NYC Nurse-Family Partnership** programs for support from a personal nurse during their pregnancy through their child's second birthday.
- All families who recently arrived in the U.S. with newborns should be referred to the **New Family Home Visits Program**. Through this program, a trained health worker — such as a nurse, doula or community health worker — will make in-person or virtual visits to the home of a parent who has an infant born within the last three months. Trained health workers offer resources, including cribs and diapers, for infants and families.
- The **Citywide Doula Initiative** provides professional, no-cost doula services to residents living in neighborhoods most affected by COVID-19. Any pregnant or birthing person can be referred to the program.

School Health Requirements

NYC schools offer many health services to support student health. School physicians can perform basic screening physical exams and refer or connect students to medical homes and support management and treatment plans established by community medical providers. School physicians and nurses help manage the health of students with chronic diseases such as asthma, allergies and diabetes. Students who have health issues and disabilities can receive prescribed medicine, skilled nursing treatments and **504 Accommodations** in school by completing a **medication administration form** annually.

- The NYC Department of Education (DOE)'s **Health Services webpage** describes the health services that NYC schools offer students and includes links to medication administration forms.
- **School immunization requirements** include requirements by grade, immunization compliance, criteria medical exemptions and information on serology tests that can satisfy immunization requirements. Vaccinate students urgently with all required immunizations, as needed, to avoid exclusion from school.
- **Medical Requirements for Child Care and New School Entrants** describes medical requirements and detailed immunization requirements (the footnotes provide guidance on each required vaccine). It details how to find fillable New Admission Examination (CH-205) forms that include the student's pre-populated vaccination histories that are available in the CIR. A savable version of the pre-populated CH-205 form is available in the CIR and accessible for use to update as needed.

Developmental Screening

Adverse childhood experiences impact early childhood health and development. Young children of immigrant families should be screened for possible developmental or behavioral issues as recommended by the **American Academy of Pediatrics**. Even with families where English is not their primary language, age-appropriate developmental and behavioral screening can be completed with the use of validated multilingual screening tools, such as the Ages & Stages Questionnaires or Survey of Well-being of Young Children, and historical assessment of milestones, such as the CDC's **Developmental Milestones tracker**. While there may be cultural differences in parenting and disparities in reading or sharing books with children, referral to the NYC Health Department's **Early Intervention (EI) Program** (for children from newborn to age 2) or DOE's **Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) Program** (for children age 3 to 5) should occur promptly if screening results are concerning.

- To make a referral to the EI Program, call **311**.
- To learn more about the EI Program or access parent brochures about the program, including in additional languages, visit the NYC Health Department's **Early Intervention Action Kit webpage**.
- To learn more about the CPSE Program, call 646-389-7171.

Developmental Disabilities

The NYS Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) is the State agency that provides supports and services for people with developmental disabilities, such as cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, autism spectrum disorders, Prader-Willi syndrome and other neurological impairments. The types of services the OPWDD offers include employment supports, behavioral supports, family supports, respite for caregivers, assistive devices and vehicle or home modification, skills development to help people live independently, clinical services, and housing supports. The first step to getting services is to call 866-946-9733 or 711 (for New York Relay Service), then let the operator know which

county you live in and that you would like to apply for services. Interpretation and translation services are available in any language upon request.

Trauma

For many people who are seeking asylum, finding refuge entails traveling long distances and enduring numerous experiences before getting help. Despite being resilient, many people seeking asylum are at elevated risk for experiencing poor mental health due to traumatic pre- and post-migration experiences and preexisting social and mental health conditions that can impair their ability to cope. Traumatic events impact adults and children and can affect the way they feel, think and behave. While children's reactions may vary depending on their age and understanding of what happened, some common signs for trauma at any age include:

- **Physical reactions**, such as exhaustion, headaches, dizziness, chills and sweating, rapid heart rate, and gastrointestinal problems
- **Behavioral reactions**, such as not working effectively, increased conflicts at home, emotional outbursts, problems with eating and having nightmares
- **Emotional reactions**, such as fear, anxiety, agitation, irritability, anger, helplessness and emotional numbing
- **Cognitive reactions**, such as confusion, forgetfulness, problems with making decisions, and preoccupation with or reliving traumatic situations
- **Spiritual reactions**, such as questioning basic beliefs

When signs of trauma are present, it is important to provide support and treatment as early as possible. Timely intervention can improve long-term mental health outcomes. Respond to people in distress in a humane and supportive way to help alleviate their stress and improve coping. Psychological first aid (PFA) is a set of simple, evidence-based techniques that can be used by anyone (nonprofessionals and professionals) to respond to people in distress and who have recently experienced trauma. The goal of providing PFA is to reduce acute stress caused by exposure to recent traumatic events and mitigate the stress's negative effects on health and functioning. PFA incorporates promoting safety, connections to help and resources, reuniting them with family and friends, and offering hope to have a better ability to cope long-term. People with signs of serious trauma-related stress should be referred for appropriate mental health support.

NYC Well is a free, confidential helpline staffed by trained counselors who can provide brief counseling and referrals to mental health and substance use support services in more than 200 languages:

- Call 888-NYC-WELL (888-692-9355).
- Text "WELL" to 65173 (24/7 text and chat services are available in English, Spanish and more than 200 additional languages).
- Chat online at nyc.gov/nycwell.

For more information on children experiencing trauma, visit the CDC's **Post-traumatic Stress Disorder in Children webpage**.

If someone's symptoms become severe or they talk about harming themselves or someone else, call **911**.

Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is the use of power and control to force, defraud or coerce someone into engaging in or providing labor or services, including commercial sex. Traffickers exploit social and economic

inequity for their own benefit, using tactics such as violence, emotional manipulation and psychological threats. People and families who are migrants may be especially vulnerable to this type of exploitation.

- Learn more about how to identify human trafficking [here](#).
- If you think someone you are working with might have been trafficked, call NYC's 24/7 Crime Victims Hotline at 866-689-HELP (866-689-4357) for free, confidential services and support.

Lead Screening

Lead poisoning disproportionately impacts children and pregnant people who recently arrived in the U.S. Some people may arrive from their countries of origin with lead burdens and compromised nutritional status. After arriving in the U.S., they may use contaminated products or live in older homes where lead hazards are more likely. The NYC Health Department recommends health care providers:

- Perform blood lead testing for all immigrant children and pregnant and lactating people upon entering the U.S.
- Repeat blood lead testing three to six months later for all children age 6 or younger who recently arrived in the U.S., regardless of their initial blood lead test results.
- Evaluate children and pregnant and lactating people who recently arrived in the U.S. for adequate intake of calcium and iron, and provide vitamin supplements as needed. Adequate stores may decrease gastrointestinal absorption of lead.
- At minimum, the anemia evaluation in children should include a hemoglobin or hematocrit and one or more of the following: mean corpuscular volume combined with red cell distribution, ferritin, transferrin saturation or reticulocyte hemoglobin content.
- All pregnant and lactating people who recently arrived in the U.S. should be prescribed a prenatal or multivitamin with adequate iron and calcium.

For more information about lead poisoning, visit nyc.gov/lead or call **311** and ask for the Healthy Homes Program.

Additional Screening

People with symptoms of infection or children with failure to thrive may need to be screened for parasitic infection based on their country of origin. Consider screening for other infectious diseases based on the person's history or symptoms.

NYC Health Department health screening recommendations for people who recently arrived in the U.S. are based on the CDC's **guidance for newly arriving refugees**, as these populations may share similar health considerations. Medical screening may identify a wide range of infectious diseases and noncommunicable conditions and is recommended as soon as feasible upon arrival in the U.S.

The following are recommended for all people who recently arrived in the U.S.:

- Complete blood count with a white blood cell differential and platelets
 - Eosinophilia in people who recently arrived in the U.S. most likely indicates the presence of a parasitic infection (see **Presumptive Treatment and Medical Screening for Parasites in Newly Arriving Refugees**), although other etiologies, such as allergies, medication reactions and atopy, may account for the finding.
 - Many people who are seeking asylum are at risk for various forms of anemias, including nutritional and inherited anemias. Clinicians should review CDC guidance, such as **Complete Blood Count with Red Blood Cell Indices, White Blood Cell Differential, and Platelet Count: Domestic Guidance**.

- Urinalysis (if the person is old enough to provide a “clean catch” urine specimen)
- Infant metabolic screening in newborns (according to **NYS guidelines**)

Food Assistance

If you are working with people who need food, you can direct them to one of NYC’s food pantries, which provide groceries to cook at home or access to community kitchens that provide hot meals. Food pantries can be found using the interactive **Food Help NYC map**. You can also download a list of **NYC food pantries and community kitchens** or call **311** to find the nearest locations. Refer patients to the following programs:

- Some people may be eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which helps people with low income buy food. Additional information about SNAP is available **here**.
- Some people (including pregnant, breastfeeding and postpartum people, infants, and children age 5 and younger) may be eligible for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). Additional information about the WIC Program is available **here**.

Legal Services

Many people who recently arrived in the U.S. have immediate need for immigration legal screening and assistance, as they are required to check in with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, attend immigration court hearings, and file their asylum application within one year of their arrival in the U.S. Community members can call NYC’s immigration legal services hotline at 800-354-0365, or they can call **311** and ask for the hotline, Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., for:

- Answers to immigration-related questions
- Information on immigration policy
- Connections to City-funded, free and safe immigration legal help, including immigration legal screenings, application assistance events and legal representation
- Referrals to other community-based resources and support services, including to-be-announced legal services for people who are seeking asylum or recently arrived in the U.S.

The NYC Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs offers information about how community members can avoid becoming the victim of immigration services fraud **here**.

Thank you for your help in addressing the health needs of the most recently arrived New Yorkers, and for your support in making New York’s health care system more welcoming to all of our city’s residents, regardless of insurance or immigration status.

Sincerely,



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Health and Mental Hygiene