



Immunizations for Refugee Communities Q and A

What is a refugee?

While the words refugee and immigrant are sometimes used interchangeably, they are actually two different terms. This document seeks to address common questions that immunizations providers may have when serving refugee populations. A refugee is a person who cannot return to their home country out of fear that they will be persecuted because of their race, religion, political opinion, national origin, or membership in a particular social group. Refugee status is a form of protection that may be granted by the Department of Homeland Security to people who meet the definition of refugee, and who are of special humanitarian concern to the United States. A person who comes to this country as an immigrant may seek asylum as a refugee by submitting a claim for asylum. Refugees and asylees comprise the majority of displaced persons resettled to the United States.

Why is immunizing refugees any different from immunizing anyone else?

When treating patients who are refugees, it's important to keep in mind that refugees experience high rates of stress, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder compared to the general public. More than one third of refugees report having been near death prior to resettlement, and about one-in-three have lost a family member or friend. Most have experienced hunger or thirst, and nearly 70 percent have lived through combat. Remaining sensitive to refugees who have likely experienced extreme trauma, and respecting that refugees may have different cultural practices and perspectives is central to providing health care to refugees.

Do refugees qualify for Oregon Health Plan?

Refugee families are eligible for Oregon Health Plan for their first 8 months in the United States.

What if a refugee patient has not yet received their OHP card?

OHP will pay claims retroactively to the first day of a refugee's arrival in the U.S.

Do refugees qualify for 317 funded vaccines?

An adult refugee who is uninsured is eligible for 317 funded vaccine if they fall within one of the eligibility categories in the 317 chart available at <http://public.health.oregon.gov/PreventionWellness/VaccinesImmunization/ImmunizationProviderResources/Documents/317chart.pdf>. Uninsured children are eligible for all routinely recommended vaccines via the VFC program when they are served in a Rural Health Clinic (RHC) or Federally Qualified Health Clinic (FQHC).

How do we communicate with refugee patients who don't speak English?

Interpretation services are likely available within your county. If you are unable to locate interpretation please let us know, and we will help you to locate an interpreter.

Refugee Health Technical Assistance Center has a great webpage on working with an interpreter here: <http://refugeehealthta.org/access-to-care/language-access/best-practices-communicating-through-an-interpreter/>

Where can I find Vaccine Information Statements in languages other than English?

Vaccine Information Statements are available in most languages on the Immunization Action Coalition website at <http://www.immunize.org/vis/>

What vaccines are recommended for refugees? Many refugees will have already received immunizations as part of their relocation in the United States. The CDC website has great information on evaluating and updating immunizations during the for newly arrived refugees at the following link:

<http://www.cdc.gov/immigrantrefugeehealth/guidelines/domestic/immunizations-guidelines.html>

Do school law requirements differ for refugee children?

Refugee children have the same immunization requirements for school attendance as all children in Oregon. Children starting school in the United States for the first time need a record showing at least one dose of each required vaccine (or a medical or nonmedical exemption) before their first day of school. If refugee children need immunizations, get them started on the immunization series as soon as possible, so they will have the required documentation for school attendance. Make sure to provide a copy of the immunization record to the family, with instructions to give a copy to the child's school.

Students who are considered homeless are to be enrolled in school immediately, even if they do not have documentation of immunizations; the school determines whether the child should be considered to be homeless. However, like all students in Oregon, homeless students need to be up-to-date on their immunizations by the annual February exclusion day, or they will be excluded from school.