COVID-19 Testing among Refugees, Immigrants, and Migrants: A Checklist for Health Departments

Refugee, immigrant, and migrant (RIM) communities have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Testing is an important tool to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, along with ensuring appropriate follow-up and allocation of resources. This checklist of actions for health departments will help effectively plan COVID-19 testing among RIM communities.

Community Engagement and Partnerships

- Develop partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs), grassroots organizations, faith-based organizations and other community groups. Maintain those relationships across COVID-19 response activities, including CICT (see our community engagement toolkit for more resources)
- Partner with health clinics who have established and trusted community relationships to raise awareness about COVID-19
- Create informal and formal partnerships between health departments and communities such as communities of practice, community liaisons and/or community advisory boards
- Hire bilingual and bicultural staff from local communities to aid in testing, both as medical and support staff
- Develop culturally and linguistically appropriate messaging about COVID-19 testing
- Raise community awareness of COVID-19 testing by working with community partners to disseminate advertising of the testing event
- Connect with your State Refugee Health Coordinator, who can introduce you to clinical and community partners working with refugee populations and resources in your state

The National Resource Center for Refugees, Immigrants, and Migrants (NRC-RIM) is funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to support state and local health departments working with RIM communities. Learn more at nrcrim.umn.edu. Last update: 01/12/2021.
Identify and collaborate with a COVID-19 testing laboratory that has the capacity to run the COVID-19 tests

Cultural and Linguistic Considerations

- Offer testing at locations that are accessible and appropriate for the community in collaboration with community partners
- Make testing easy and unintrusive; consider the following:
  - Offer testing in a walk-up setting so individuals without cars can access
  - Do not require appointments
  - Keep any individual information collected to a minimum and optional
- Overcome stigma about testing by performing community outreach in advance of the event; hand out information and masks in the community around the testing event
- Collaborate and co-brand testing events with community partners
- Provide bilingual and bicultural staff or interpreters at testing locations who align with the communities expected to attend the testing event
- Collect preferred language at time of testing to facilitate in future case investigation
- Offer culturally and linguistically appropriate education on topics such as what to do while waiting for a test, the process of contact tracing and case investigation, and information about isolation and quarantine; this should be provided primarily verbally and then reinforced by printed translated handouts

Privacy Considerations and Case Investigation/Contact Tracing

- Acknowledge that some members of RIM communities have distrust of government authorities, may have concerns about legal status in the US, and have suffered oppression and/or violence by government authorities in their country of origin; consider including reassuring information in clear and simple language
- Provide individuals clear instructions on what personal information is being collected at the event, including name and contact information; reassure that names and contact information will be kept confidential
☐ If possible, collect two forms of contact information to aid in case investigations/contact tracing for positive cases. If they don’t have an email, generate “dummy email” that will be checked by staff that will call people with test results.

☐ Confirm that the phone number is recorded correctly by making a quick call on-site.

☐ Provide specific details and reassurance about receiving phone call(s), including the exact number that will appear on their phone, if called; emphasize the importance of answering the call and encourage them to save the CICT number in their phone, if known at the time of testing.

☐ Provide guidance on what information may be collected if there is a positive test result, including names and contact information of close contacts; describe how this will improve their overall care and will not impact their legal status or that of close contacts.

Follow-Up

☐ Acknowledge the difficulty some RIM community members will face when asked to isolate or quarantine (e.g., crowded housing, employment concerns especially for essential workers). Provide practical information: see CDC guidance and support those living shared housing and households living in close quarters.

☐ Find a community health center or community-based organization that can support individuals who test positive to provide medical advice and resources for management, isolation, and follow up.

☐ Ensure follow-up is performed by individuals who speak the preferred language of the community, or if that is not possible, with the use of a professional interpreter.

☐ Share relevant call numbers, including numbers for health departments, clinics, and COVID-19 hotlines.

☐ Find community partners who have infrastructure to assist with providing social support services, including existing services for housing for those who need to isolate/quarantine (particularly in multi-generational households), food delivery, medication delivery, sanitization supply delivery, childcare, employment support, and rent/utility assistance.

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