

Health Services

A person who has been trafficked is at risk of short- and long-term health consequences and may seek care for injuries or illness, or to address neglected pre-existing health conditions. As discussed in Module 3, many of the primary indicators that a person has been trafficked are health related.

A trafficked person may be suffering from or coping with:

Mental Health Consequences

- depression
- suicidal ideation or attempts
- anxiety
- post-traumatic stress disorder
- substance abuse, misuse, and addiction
- behavioural responses such as anger, fear, and hostility

Physical Abuse and Deprivation

- injuries (such as bruises, cuts, burns, broken bones, branding, strangulation)
- deprivation of light
- deprivation of sleep, exhaustion, and/or insomnia
- deprivation of food, malnutrition
- pain (headaches, body pain)

Sexual and Reproductive Health Consequences

- sexually transmitted infections
- genital injury and trauma
- pelvic inflammatory disease
- pregnancy related problems
- abortion related problems
- poor reproductive health

Occupational and Environmental Hazards

- dehydration
- physical injury
- infections/exposure to disease
- heat or cold overexposure

Primary Health Concerns

- immunizations non-existent or not up to date
- dental infections or problems
- pre-existing health conditions neglected
- exposure to communicable disease

If You are a Health Care Provider

Health care providers are in a unique position to assist trafficked persons. Often, health care will be the only service a trafficked person accesses during their exploitation as traffickers are known to seek medical attention for those under their control in order to maintain their profitability.

For more information, see the International Organization for Migration publication *Caring For Trafficked Persons: Guidance for Health Providers* and other materials listed in our Resource section.

Special Considerations

- Accessing health services may be a new or uncomfortable experience for a trafficked person. A trafficked person may want to be accompanied when going to a health clinic or hospital.
- Explain what to expect during the exam or appointment. Remind them that they can ask questions or end the appointment at any time.
- In small or rural communities, including Aboriginal communities, privacy and confidentiality can be a particular challenge. The trafficked person may prefer accessing health services outside of their immediate area.

Where to Look

To find the most appropriate health care services in your community:

- Check with your local health authority for community health centres in your area. (In Aboriginal communities, check with the local federal health authority, usually located in the band office.) Ask if any of the health centres provide services specifically for vulnerable populations or people without health cards.
- Try the emergency room at the nearest hospital. (Some emergency rooms have a team of specialized nurse examiners for cases involving violence, including sexual assaults.)
- Visit the [Health Canada](#) website for a list of provincial health departments.

