

Health status of migrant workers in Canada

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International migrant workers entering Canada generally arrive healthy but their low-skilled occupations may put them at risk of health issues and they may face barriers to health care, states an analysis in CMAJ (Canadian Medical Association Journal).

Canada admitted 192 519 international migrant workers on temporary work visas in 2008, the highest number to date. Mexico and the Philippines are the main sources of low-skilled migrant workers, many of whom work in the agricultural sector or as live in domestic help.

Increased mobility of people across the globe raises concerns about public health management, especially regarding infectious diseases. Research on the health of migrant workers and access to health care is limited, and more information is needed.

Linguistic and cultural differences may make migrant workers reluctant to seek medical care. As well, attitudes of employers to a potentially ill employee may also be a barrier. Medical professionals may not have the training or experience to understand the social and cultural background of migrant workers, which can affect their ability to address and treat migrant workers' concerns.

"Popular portrayals of migrant workers as 'vectors of disease' who ought to be stopped at the border are misleading," state Kerry Preibisch, Departments of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario, and Jenna Hennebry, International Migration Research Centre at Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario. "International

migrant workers tend to arrive healthy and all undergo medical screening as part of their visa application. If their health status deteriorates while in Canada, it is more likely due to their new working and living conditions than a pre-existing condition."

Common health problems for [migrant workers](#) include musculoskeletal injuries, eye and skin problems and mental health concerns such as depression and anxiety, write the authors of a related practice primer for physicians.

"Migrant farm workers are a vulnerable group with particular risks and needs," writes Dr. Michael Pysklywec, the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers and McMaster University, with coauthors. "Issues particularly related to occupational injury and exposures, but also mental and sexual health, have been identified as areas of concern."

The authors provide suggestions for [health](#) professionals caring for this group, such as offering clinic hours during which workers will be in town, linking with local groups that may help with translation and communication, providing multi-lingual patients handouts and being sensitive to the physical demands of migrants' work and potential symptoms and illnesses.

Provided by Canadian Medical Association Journal

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