

# Refugees deserve health care, compassion, U.S. pediatricians say

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(HealthDay)—The U.S. government should treat immigrant and refugee

children with compassion and provide them with appropriate health care, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) says in a new policy statement.

"Many of the immigrant [children](#) arriving to this country from our southern border are victims of unspeakable violence, persecution and abject poverty," AAP President Dr. Fernando Stein said in a news release from the group.

"From the moment they are placed in U.S. custody, they deserve a warm, safe and nurturing environment. They should receive health care that meets basic standards," Stein added.

Children should never be placed in detention facilities, regardless of whether they arrive in the United States alone or with an adult, the AAP said. In addition, children should never be separated from their families.

Immigrant and refugee children should be treated with dignity and respect, and should not be subjected to conditions that may cause them further harm or trauma, the [policy statement](#) said.

Also, the children should be provided with comprehensive, culturally sensitive medical care in their own language.

U.S. Department of Homeland Security facilities for temporary housing of immigrants don't meet basic standards of care for children in residential settings, the statement said.

Dr. Marsha Griffin, policy statement co-author, said, "We are hearing reports about children who have been detained, even for a short time, who are showing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression and behavioral problems." Griffin is co-chair of the AAP Immigrant Health Special Interest Group.

"There is no evidence that spending any time in detention is safe for children. Parents, too, may be traumatized by the isolating conditions, making it difficult for them to respond to their children's needs," she said in the news release.

About 95 percent of children arriving at the southern U.S. border are from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. Extreme violence and poverty are common in those countries, and they don't have state protection for at-risk children and families, the AAP report said.

In 2016, nearly 60,000 unaccompanied children and nearly 78,000 families sought asylum at the border, according to U.S. government data.

Dr. Alan Shapiro, another policy statement co-author, pointed out that "it is not illegal to come to our border and seek protection."

Shapiro said that "these families are fleeing violence and they are asking for asylum. They should be viewed as asylum seekers, not undocumented or illegal immigrants. We should treat them humanely and compassionately."

The statement was published online March 13 in the journal *Pediatrics*.

**More information:** The World Health Organization has more on [child refugees](#).

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