

Immigration Medical Examination & Departure Health Check for refugees

The health requirement and entry into Australia

Humanitarian entrants and refugees are required to undergo the same medical checks as other migrants seeking permanent residence in Australia. If the applicant does not meet the health requirement (e.g. due to potential future costs), a “health waiver” may be given, allowing migration despite the health condition. Since 2012, the health waiver process has been facilitated for those on humanitarian visas.

What health screening includes

The immigration medical examination (IME) is performed 3 to 12 months prior to departure and may be repeated if more than 6 months have passed since the IME. Commonwealth-approved medical staff perform the following for all permanent migrants and refugees:

- Medical history & examination
- Chest x-ray (11 years and above)
- HIV serology (15 years and above)
- Syphilis serology (refugees 15 years & above)
- Latent tuberculosis infection (LTBI) test (children aged 2 to 10 years from countries with moderate to high TB prevalence)

Hepatitis B testing is done for some (e.g. pregnant women) and is currently done in humanitarian entrants from the Middle East. Complete details can be found

at: www.homeaffairs.gov.au/trav/visa/health/meeting-the-health-requirement/health-examinations#

Children under 15 years are also tested for HIV if they are international adoptees or have a history of blood transfusion.

Anyone found to have active tuberculosis (TB) will

have their migration delayed until they have treatment and are cleared of disease. These people, and those with an abnormal chest x-ray but no active disease, sign a conditional entry permit called a Health Undertaking (see overleaf).

Since they have already been screened prior to arrival, NSW does not conduct routine post-arrival chest x-rays for TB.

Departure Health Check

The Departure Health Check (DHC) is undertaken within 72 hours of departure for Australia for some humanitarian visa holders, in particular fully funded refugees (as opposed to those sponsored by relatives or others). It aims to ensure fitness-to-fly and flags any health issues that require medical follow-up after arrival. The DHC is voluntary, and consists of:

- a check for current symptoms (e.g. fever, rash)
- tuberculosis (TB) evaluation for those with a history of TB
- malaria test (rapid antigen test) if at-risk, and treatment if positive
- treatment for intestinal parasites
- certain vaccinations, including measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) for people aged from nine months to 54 years

If any problems are identified, the client may be delayed and provided with treatment until they are ‘fit to fly’. Medical follow-up that is required once they arrive in Australia will be flagged depending on urgency and type of medical issue:

- **‘Critical Medical Issue’** is the term used for cases assessed as requiring medical follow-up within 24-72 hours of arrival. They may have a medical or nursing escort to accompany them *en-route* to Australia.
- **‘Potential Medical Issue’** is the term used for cases possibly requiring follow up of a significant medical condition, though may be resolved on arrival.

This alerts system aims to ensure that appropriate settlement and health services can be put in place for their arrival (DSS).

Health Undertakings

A Health Undertaking is a conditional entry permit that a small number of humanitarian entrants (or migrants) will have signed before they were issued with a visa. It requires them to contact the Health Undertaking Service, currently contracted to BUPA (1800 811 334) for follow-up within a specified time of arriving in Australia – usually between 1 and 4 weeks.

Health Undertakings are most commonly given to people who have been treated for TB following their overseas medical examination, whose chest x-ray was suggestive of inactive or past TB, or occasionally whose chest x-ray was of poor quality or had some other minor abnormality. It does not mean they have suspected or active TB, as such individuals are not allowed to travel until active TB is excluded.

The local Chest Clinic will be contacted (by BUPA) and will arrange follow up as a routine.

This service is free of charge.

Health undertakings may also be given to people who are known to have hepatitis B, hepatitis C or HIV. Information or advice about non-TB Health Undertakings to NSW is available through the Public Health Units, or Multicultural HIV and Hepatitis Service for HIV Health Undertakings.

Due to language barriers, stress and poor understanding of the process, some people may not fully understand the Health Undertaking or their obligations in signing it. These individuals will benefit from further advice to understand their reason for the call-back, and their responsibilities, including the need to notify the Health Undertaking Service or their local chest clinic if they change their address.

Further Health Undertakings information can be accessed at: www.homeaffairs.gov.au/trav/visa/health/meeting-the-health-requirement/health-undertakings

Health screening of asylum seekers

All persons living in the community and applying for a permanent visa, including a protection visa (i.e. asylum seekers) have to undergo a health assessment here in Australia (currently contracted to BUPA).

In some cases asylum seekers may be reluctant to disclose information about their health, fearing that this may prejudice their application for permanent residency.

Asylum seekers in immigration detention undergo screening and immunisation.

Relevant services

Health Undertaking Service	1800 811 334
Public Health Unit	1300 066 055
Multicultural HIV & Hepatitis Service	9515 1234
Refugee Advice & Casework Service	9114 1794
Legal Aid NSW – Refugee Service	1300 888 529
Asylum Seekers Centre	9361 5606
NSW Refugee Health Service	8778 0770
STARTTS	9794 1900

Chest Clinics in NSW:

www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/tuberculosis/Pages/chest-clinics.aspx

Public Health Units NSW:

www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/Pages/plus.aspx

References and Further Reading

Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian programme fact sheet: www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about/corporate/information/fact-sheets/60refugee

Departure Health Check (DHC) fact sheet: www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about/corporate/information/fact-sheets/67a-dhc

Department of Social Services (DSS) Case Management Guidelines; Humanitarian Settlement Program: Sep 2017

Tuberculosis health undertakings for migrants and refugees arriving in NSW: www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/tuberculosis/Pages/refugee-health-undertakings.aspx