

# HEALTH SERVICES

Any individual must always first go to the clinic closest to where he or she lives before going to a hospital. If necessary, the clinic will give a referral letter to go to a hospital. Only in emergency cases can an individual go directly to a hospital for assistance



- Section 12(2) grants everyone the right to bodily and psychological integrity, which includes the right to make decisions on reproduction; to security in and control over ones' body; and not to be subjected to medical or scientific experiments without ones' informed consent.
- 24(a) grants everyone the right to an environment that is not harmful to his/her health or well-being.
- 27(1)(a) grants everyone the right to access to health care services, including reproductive health care services
- 27(2) the state must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of each of these rights.
- Section 27(3) states that no one may be refused emergency medical treatment.
- Section 28(1) (c) grants every child the right to basic health care services.
- Patients' Rights Charter (1999) provides:
  - ▲ Timely emergency care, regardless of ability to pay
  - ▲ Treatment, rehabilitation and counselling
  - ▲ Positive attitude by health care workers
  - ▲ Health information in a language understood by the patient
  - ▲ Privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent
  - ▲ Lodge complaints and have complaints investigated
- The Patients Right Charter is not legally binding.

**Health care is provided by SA law, implementing legislation, and policy.  
The Constitution provides that everyone in the territory of SA has certain rights to health care services. This includes refugees and asylum seekers.**

## PERMITS

- Although 'everyone' is entitled to health care under the Bill of Rights, this is moderated by law and policy.
- Asylum seeker and refugee permits provide entry to public hospitals and clinics.
- Appointment slips, whether small or formalized with a fingerprint, also provide entry at most public hospitals.

## HOSPITAL FEES

- SA health-care system consists of a private and a government-managed system. Health care provided by the government is generally offered at minimal cost.
- Asylum seekers and refugees at public hospitals and clinics may be charged the same fees rates as SA in similar circumstances. A person must present an asylum seeker permit or refugee permit to receive the reduced rate

## HEALTHCARE POLICY

Department of Health Policy offers free primary health care for pregnant and lactating women; free primary health care for children under 6

- **Prenatal (before birth) care:** - When a female is pregnant she has to visit her local clinic to check if the baby is growing at the expected or normal rate. It is very important that she visit the clinic as soon as she's has confirmed that she is pregnant.

## Steps to follow



- ▲ Make an appointment at your local clinic or midwifery. On the day of your visit the nurse or midwife will:
  - ▲ ask you about your medical history
  - ▲ take your blood pressure
  - ▲ weigh you to work out your body mass index
  - ▲ test your urine to check for the level of protein which could indicate a pregnancy-related condition called pre-eclampsia



- ▲ take blood samples and arrange for you to have a dating scan to find out how many weeks pregnant you are
- ▲ Feel your womb to get an idea of whether your baby is growing at the expected rate.
- ▲ The check-ups may vary from facility to facility, but it is recommended that after the first booking, first time mothers with a normal pregnancy should have 10 more antenatal checks.
- ▲ The service is free at local clinics. Public hospitals charge a minimum fee.

→ **Child immunisation:** - Newborn babies and children up to the age of five years need to be immunised.

→ Parents are expected to ensure their children are immunised. A detailed record of immunisation may be requested when applying for school registration and social grants.

### Steps to follow:



- ▲ Visit your local clinic.
- ▲ Fill in a form/card on arrival at the clinic if you are a first time visitor. Previous visitors should bring along their cards.
- ▲ Notify the nursing sister of your child's age and the child's history of immunisations.
- ▲ The nursing sister will take your child's weight, length and the head circumference to determine if your child is growing at the expected rate.

- ▲ The child will be immunised according to their age.
- ▲ You will be advised on how to handle the child's reaction to the vaccine (they sometimes develop a fever from the vaccine and it is advisable to inform the nursing sister if your child is allergic to eggs).
- ▲ You will then be given the date for the next immunisation.
- ▲ The service is free at state owned clinics and hospitals.

### Compulsory medical examination, hospitalisation or treatment for people with communicable diseases or infections

If a doctor thinks that you could be suffering from a communicable (contagious) disease, the doctor may insist that you must undergo a compulsory medical examination, hospitalisation or treatment at a place chosen by the doctor.

#### The doctor may:

- ▲ refer you for treatment, hospitalisation or further examination
- ▲ examine you
- ▲ prescribe treatment
- ▲ admit you to a hospital or other place of isolation determined by the doctor, to remain under medical supervision and receive treatment
- ▲ You will remain in the hospital or institution until you are free of the communicable disease or infection that may endanger other people's lives.
- ▲ The doctor will discharge you from the hospital or institution once you have been declared free of the communicable disease or infection.

### HIV / AIDS

An estimated 5.7 million people are living with HIV in South Africa, which makes up approximately 17 per cent of the world's HIV population, according to the World Health Organization.

→ Although conflict, displacement, food insecurity and poverty might leave them more susceptible to HIV, refugees do not always display higher rates of the infection.



- To find out whether a person is infected with HIV and to receive treatment that can help him / her lead a healthier, more productive life if infected, a blood test is required. Most public-health facilities test for HIV. The test is free.
- Because HIV poses challenges in pregnancy, health worker initiated counselling and testing will form part of all antenatal care. This will be geared to find problems early in the pregnancy. Where necessary, prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) will start at 14 weeks of pregnancy.

**Refugees and Asylum Seekers have a right to get free ARV treatment at public Hospitals**



- If a woman is pregnant and has tested HIV-positive, public-health facilities offer Nevirapine - an anti-retroviral (ARV) drug that is given to prevent the transmission of HIV from the infected mother to the unborn child during birth.
- In cases of rape or sexual assault, it is government policy to provide a 28-day course of anti-retrovirals to victims in order to prevent the transmission of HIV. This is known as post-exposure prophylaxis. If you choose to take post-exposure prophylaxis you need to do so within 72 hours of being raped or sexually assaulted.
- This treatment is indicated only if you were HIV-negative before you were raped / assaulted.

## MENTAL HEALTH / COUNSELLING

Prior to flight, individuals who become refugees may face a wide variety of traumatic events. It is very common for refugees or asylum seekers to experience mental health difficulties as a result of the traumatic events that caused them to flee their home countries, such as severe persecution or violence or the loss of one or many family members in an armed conflict, or be subjected to or witness sexual violence.



- In addition to the often life-threatening stresses experienced immediately prior to flight, refugees frequently experience recurring losses, challenges, and changes during the exile/acclulturation and resettlement/repatriation periods.
- Having left their homes, refugees are often forced to confront isolation, hostility, violence, and racism in their new locations. Individuals who are resettled in refugee camps often face living situations that are, at times, over-crowded, rife with the threat of infectious diseases, and primitive in design.
- Additional chronic stressors that refugees must deal with include socioeconomic disadvantages, poor physical health, and the collapse of social support.
- Although a large number of the individuals adjust well, many suffer significant psychological distress as a result of their exposure to traumatic events and the hardships associated with life as a refugee.
- Such events may cause refugees and asylum seekers to feel overwhelmed with anxiety or depression.
- Many trauma victims develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which features symptoms such as hyper-arousal and avoidance of reminders of the trauma they experienced. People with PTSD see the world differently because the disorder distorts the normal appraisal process.
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is a debilitating condition that follows a terrifying event. Often people with PTSD have persistent frightening thoughts and memories of their ordeal and feel emotionally numb, especially with people they were once close to.



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- The Trauma Centre for the Survivors of Violence and Torture provides FREE professional mental health counselling services to people who have experienced or who are affected by violence. Refugees and asylum seekers are encouraged to attend