



News/Update: Technical Instructions for Medical History and Physical Examination, Syphilis, and Gonorrhea for Panel Physicians

December 13th, 2016

Dear State Refugee Health Coordinator:

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Division of Global Migration and Quarantine has updated its Overseas Technical Instructions for the medical history and physical examination of aliens, syphilis, and gonorrhea for Panel Physicians. For gonorrhea, these new technical instructions are the same as the most recent updates since the "**Gonorrhea Technical Instructions for Panel Physicians and Civil Surgeons**" notification sent out July 11th, 2016, which replaced the Other Sexually Transmitted Diseases Technical Instructions.

For your situational awareness, below is the letter that was sent out on Monday, November 28, 2016, to all Panel Physicians that examine US-bound refugees. The changes to the technical exams described below may in turn change information provided to domestic clinicians on the Department of State Medical Forms regarding female refugees who are victims of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C).

Dear US Panel Physicians,

We are pleased to announce we have updated the following:

- [Medical History and Physical Examination](#)
- [Syphilis](#)
- [Gonorrhea](#)

We have made the following change across all three of these Technical Instructions:

- The external genital examination is no longer required for all applicants.
- The external genital examination is now only required when staging syphilis in people who have this disease. Please see the Syphilis Technical Instructions for details.

We are making this change because we now require sensitive tests for both syphilis and gonorrhea, and no longer require an examination for other sexually transmitted diseases. Therefore, an external genital examination is no longer needed except when patients test positive for syphilis and the disease needs to be staged. The breast exam is also not required; therefore, applicants who are not diagnosed with syphilis should not have to disrobe.

As some of you may know, while CDC worked on the Gonorrhea Technical Instructions released earlier this year and these current updates, the [US Government Accountability Office \(GAO\)](#) conducted an investigation on the US Government's response to female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C). The [GAO's report on FGM/C](#) was publicly released on August 1, 2016. This report states that an estimated 513,000 women and girls in the United States are at risk of or had been subjected to FGM/C in 2012; the report calls on the US government to improve awareness of the issue. In the United States, FGM/C is a crime.

There are significant and complex cultural sensitivities and legal consequences surrounding FGM/C and being a victim of FGM/C does not make someone inadmissible to the United States. Therefore, panel physicians should

not initiate discussions about FGM/C with female applicants. However, if female applicants voluntarily divulge they are a victim of FGM/C, please document that as part of their medical history and follow your country's laws regarding reporting acts of FGM/C to local authorities. And, for any female applicant for whom a genital examination is warranted on clinical grounds (as specified in the Technical Instructions) and you recognize they are a victim of FGM/C, please inform the applicant of your physical examination findings, document the examination findings, and follow your country's laws regarding reporting acts of FGM/C to local authorities.

Here are some resources that may be helpful for panel physicians or applicants interested in learning more about this issue as well as for any applicant who reports they are a victim of FGM/C and has physical examination findings consistent with FGM/C:

- [CDC Domestic Refugee Health guidelines on FGM/C](#)
- [US Government Fact Sheet on Female Genital Mutilation or Cutting](#)
- [United States Citizenship and Immigration Services \(USCIS\) webpage on FGM/C](#)
- [World Health Organization fact sheet on FGM/C](#)
- [United Nations Children's Fund \(UNICEF\) webpage on FGM/C](#)

We greatly appreciate your recognition of FGM/C as an important personal as well as public health problem and your efforts.

Thank you,
CDC QAP

Technical Instructions for the Medical History and Physical Examination are available here:

<http://www.cdc.gov/immigrantrefugeehealth/exams/ti/panel/technical-instructions/panel-physicians/medical-history-physical-exam.html>

Technical Instructions for Gonorrhea for Panel Physicians are available here:

<http://www.cdc.gov/immigrantrefugeehealth/exams/ti/panel/technical-instructions/panel-physicians/gonorrhea.html>

Technical Instructions for Syphilis for Panel Physicians are available here:

<http://www.cdc.gov/immigrantrefugeehealth/exams/ti/panel/technical-instructions/panel-physicians/syphilis.html>

As the letter states, there are significant and complex cultural sensitivities and legal consequences surrounding FGM/C. The CDC-supported Centers for Excellence in Refugee Health is currently working with CDC subject matter experts to write a new domestic screening guideline for women's health that will address FGM/C further. CDC will notify partners of any additional changes to the Technical Instructions.

Sincerely,



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