Introduction
Since 1975, the U.S. has resettled approximately 2.6 million refugees.

The U.S. Federal Refugee Act of 1980 was enacted to create a uniform system of service for refugees migrating to the U.S. The Act entitles all newly arriving refugees to a comprehensive health assessment.

A refugee is defined in international law and in the Refugee Act of 1980 as a person who is outside his or her country of nationality and who is unable or unwilling to return to that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution, based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Refugees legally enter the U.S. in search of freedom, peace, and opportunity for themselves and their families.

Persons are admitted as refugees after they are granted status by the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration at the U.S. Department of State and by the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Federal Resources
The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), in the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, provides assistance to refugees through its various programs and grants, so that they can achieve self-sufficiency and integration within the shortest time period after arriving in the U.S.

The Refugee Preventive Health Program (within ORR) provides grants to States and their designated health agencies to provide medical screenings in accordance with the Medical Screening Protocol for Newly Arriving Refugees and follow-up activities to those newly arrived refugees.

Rationale for Providing Health Services
Refugees face special health challenges, both as new arrivals into the U.S. and after they have been here for some time. Forced migration may expose people to a host of health and mental health risk factors. Plus, there is the challenge of coming from regions of the world with high rates of certain diseases and different health care delivery customs into the Western world with its own set of chronic health conditions.

Pennsylvania’s Refugee Health Program
In October of 2008, the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare and the Pennsylvania Department of Health entered into an agreement to increase the Commonwealth’s capacity to control communicable diseases among and resulting from, the arrival of new refugees, as well as to ensure a complete and timely health assessment for each arriving refugee, and assist healthcare providers and refugees in managing identified health problems and issues. The key partners are Pennsylvania Office of Health Equity, Bureau of Epidemiology, Family Health, Community Health, and Communicable Diseases.

Mission-Goal
The mission/goal of the Refugee Health Program is to ensure that refugee arrivals receive a comprehensive health assessment as soon as possible after entry into the U.S. for the protection of public health against communicable diseases, as well as to identify and treat health conditions or health-related issues that could delay successful resettlement.

Objectives:
To assess the current health status of all newly arriving refugees and identify health problems not identified or developed subsequent to the overseas medical exam. Ensure follow-up of refugees with conditions identified during the overseas medical exam and provide referral and treatment.

Refugee Health Assessment Primary Components are:
- Medical history and physical examination
- Tuberculosis screening
- Hepatitis screening
- Sexually Transmitted Infections & HIV screening
- Intestinal Parasite screening
- Immunizations
- Referral to appropriate related services

Contact:
Susan Johnston
Public Health Program Administrator
Refugee Health Program
Office of Health Equity
Room 905, Health & Welfare Building
625 Forster Street, Harrisburg, PA 17120
Phone: 717-547-3313; Fax: 717-780-4827
Email: sjohnston@pa.gov

or
Asresu Misikir, Dr.Ph., MPH
Epidemiologist & Refugee Health Coordinator
Refugee Health Program Section
Division of Infectious Disease Epidemiology
Bureau of Epidemiology
Phone: 717-787-3350
Fax: 717-772-6975
Email: amisikir@pa.gov