

16. Significance for Migrant Workers

Learners who are migrant farmworkers are likely to have extensive health education needs. The migrant lifestyle often means that workers do not receive primary medical care. These workers commonly seek care only when a condition urgently requires it, and often do not have follow-up care or regular visits for chronic conditions which require monitoring.

Work environment factors create specific health concerns for migrant farmworkers. Problems including headaches and irritation of the skin, nose, throat, eyes, and lungs can occur from extended exposure to pesticides. While safe pesticide handling procedures have been identified, some workers around the country have reported that they are not able to adhere to the procedures in their worksites, due to conditions like lack of water to wash pesticide residue off the skin. Others are not trained in the procedures. Instruction on safe handling of pesticides could be very helpful in adult literacy classes and would probably stimulate high learner interest.

Other health problems common to migrant farmworkers include:

- heat stroke
- dehydration
- dental problems due to lack of fluoridated water
- urinary tract infections due to urine retention because a toilet is not available
- agriculture-related injuries
- depression and substance abuse due to isolated living and working conditions

Health-related lessons which focus on prevention of or care for these conditions could be beneficial to learners. Also, because many migrant farm workers do not have regular care with a familiar provider, they can greatly benefit from instruction to develop skills in keeping track of and reporting their own and their families' medical histories and medication use.

Note: Simple, illustrated patient education materials on a variety of topics mentioned above are available on the website for the National Center for Farmworker Health at <http://www.ncfh.org>. Click on "Resource Center."

Additionally, while accurate numbers are impossible to obtain, it is believed that the following conditions may occur among migrant farmworkers with

greater frequency or worse outcomes than in many other population groups because of the lack of access to regular medical care and monitoring:

- tuberculosis
- diabetes
- various cancers
- HIV/AIDS

References

Clingerman, E. (2003). Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection and farmworkers. *Migrant Health Newslines*, 20(1) [Online]. Available: <http://ncfh.org/newsline/03-0102.pdf>

Longo, P., & Donahue, V. (1997). *Amplifying the health literacy of migrant farmworkers*. Dayton, VA: Virginia Adult Educators' Research Network.