

Human Trafficking

RED FLAGS



What to Look for During a Medical Exam/Consultation

The following is a list of potential red flags and indicators that can be useful in recognizing a potential victim of human trafficking. It is important to note that this is not an exhaustive list. Each indicator taken individually may not imply a trafficking situation and not all victims of human trafficking will exhibit these signs. However, recognition of several indicators may point toward the need for further investigation.

General Indicators that Can Apply to All Victims of Human Trafficking

- Individual does not have any type of legal documentation – i.e., license or state issued identification for US Citizens; passport, Green Card, or other identification for foreign nationals
- Individual claims to be “just visiting” an area but is unable to articulate where he/she is staying or cannot remember addresses; the individual does not know the city or state of his/her current location
- Individual has numerous inconsistencies in his/her story
- Someone is claiming to speak for, or on behalf of a victim – i.e. an interpreter, often of the same ethnic group, male or female; victim is not allowed to speak for him/herself
- Individual exhibits behaviors including “hyper-vigilance” or paranoia, fear, anxiety, depression, submission, tension and/or nervousness
- Individual exhibits a loss of sense of time or space
- Individual avoids eye contact
- Individual uses false identification papers – may not be victim’s real name
- Individual is not in control of his/her own money

Specific Health Indicators

The following indicators may present in the context of a physical exam or similar health assessment or treatment

- Malnourishment or generally poor health
- Signs of physical abuse – in particular, unexplained injuries or signs of prolonged abuse
 - Bruises
 - Black eyes
 - Burns
 - Cuts
 - Broken bones
 - Broken teeth
 - Multiple scars (including from electric prods)
- Evidence of a prolonged infection that could easily be treated through a routine physical/check up
- Addiction to drugs and/or alcohol
- Individual has no idea when his/her last medical exam was
- Lack of healthcare insurance – i.e. paying with cash

Specific Indicators that Apply to Sex Trafficking Victims

Victims of sex trafficking may exhibit a unique set of risk factors and warning signs, including the following: SOURCE: Girls Education and Mentoring Services (GEMS)

- The age of a individual has been verified to be under 18 and the individual is involved in the sex industry
- The age of the individual has been verified to be under 18 and the individual has a record of prior arrest(s) for prostitution



toll free hotline 855-363-6548
njhumantrafficking.gov **855-END-NJ-HT**

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- Discrepancies in behavior and reported age – i.e. clues in behavior or appearance that suggest that the individual is underage, but he/she lies about his/her age
- Evidence of sexual trauma
- Multiple or frequent sexually transmitted infections (STIs), especially evidence of a lack of treatment for STIs
- Multiple or frequent pregnancies
- Individual reports an excessively large number of sexual partners, especially when it is not age appropriate (i.e. 15 year old girl reporting dozens of sexual partners)
- Individuals who are under the age of 18 who express interest in, or may already be in, relationships with adults or older men
- Use of lingo or slang relating to the individual's involvement in prostitution – i.e. referring to a boyfriend as “Daddy” or talking about “the life”
- Evidence of controlling or dominating relationships – i.e. repeated phone calls from a “boyfriend” and/or excessive concern about displeasing a partner
- Individual is dressed in inappropriate clothing (i.e., lingerie or other attire associated with the sex industry)
- Presence of unexplained or unusual scar tissue – potentially from forced abortions
- Tattoos on the neck and/or lower back that the Individual is reluctant to explain – i.e. a man's name or initials (most often encountered with US citizen victims of sex trafficking)
- Other types of branding – i.e. cutting or burning
- Evidence that the victim has had to have sexual intercourse while on her monthly cycle – i.e. use of cotton balls or other products which leave residual fibers
- Family dysfunction – i.e. abuse in the home (emotional, sexual, physical), neglect, absence of a caregiver, or substance abuse – these are major risk factors for sex trafficking and can be important warning signs that the Individual might be a victim
- Individual may either be in crisis, or may downplay existing health problems or risks
- Individual may resist your help or demonstrate fear that the information he/she gives you will lead to arrest, placement in social services, return to family, or retribution from trafficker

Victim Identification

How do I conduct an assessment or exam with a potential victim of human trafficking?

- Utilize existing assessment and examination protocols for victims of abuse/sexual abuse
- Utilize existing culturally sensitive protocols
- Use age-appropriate language if working with minors
- If you ask about sexual history, be sure to distinguish between consensual experiences and non-consensual experiences
- If possible, choose a comfortable space which is conducive to confidentiality
- If appropriate, separate the individual from his/her belongings and escort/interpreter
 - The victim may be wearing/carrying some sort of tracking/communication device such as a GPS transmitter, cell phone or other small device – you can separate the victim from these devices by getting him/her into a gown and into an x-ray room

What do I do if I think I have identified a victim of human trafficking?

- Be sensitive, every incident of human trafficking is different
- Make sure you are not putting yourself or the individual in danger (i.e., take care to notice who is around when you are asking questions or providing resources)
- If you suspect that the victim is in immediate danger, notify the police by dialing 9-1-1
- Try to record as much information about the situation as possible – being careful not to put yourself or the individual in any danger
- Call the New Jersey Human Trafficking Hotline to report the incident 855.END.NJ.HT (855.363.6548)

As a health practitioner, you are in a unique position to recognize, identify, and reach out to victims. This list is intended to be a guideline only and should be adapted to fit existing organizational protocols for interacting with potential victims of child abuse, violence, sexual assault and other related crimes. Health practitioners should familiarize themselves with social service providers in their area working on the issue of human trafficking and work with these agencies to create a protocol for responding to victims of trafficking.

- Information provided by Polaris Project.

