If federal immigration agents visit a Public Health site

Guidance for staff
Preface

All people should feel safe receiving the health services that they need. Unfortunately, the current levels of fear and stress among immigrant communities may be negatively impacting the willingness of some immigrant families to seek services. For many years, immigrants have arrived in King County looking for a better future: setting down roots, opening businesses, and helping with our vital economic growth. To remain that beacon of opportunity, we must ensure that immigrants have access to vital health, legal, and social services.

King County is providing tools to our employees, and to our health care clients, to ensure that immigrants can access health services without fear, while also remaining in compliance with federal laws.

The King County Office of Equity and Social Justice and Public Health—Seattle & King County worked together to create these materials.
Did you know?

- Not all “warrants” are the same
- King County Public Health clinics do not collect information about clients’ immigration status
- Federal immigration agents have policies for when they may enter “sensitive locations” such as health facilities
Overview

- Public Health department policy identifies Public Health Centers and clinics as “private areas” – only open to those who are authorized or seeking services provided at these facilities.

- Employees are not required to answer questions or provide information to immigration agents. Each site will identify “Designated Leads” to respond to agents, as described in the following pages.

- Agents may not enter Public Health Centers and clinics (i.e. private areas) unless/until the Designated Lead determines there is a valid warrant signed by a judge.

- All other employees should refer immigration agents to the Designated Leads.

- Front Desk/Reception staff are the most likely points of contact.

- Our employees are stewards & guardians of patient privacy.
What to say and do (front desk)

Staff are not required to answer questions.

Staff should inform any immigration or law enforcement agents that:

- This health care facility is a designated private area.
- Only a Designated Lead is authorized to review a warrant or to allow entry.
- To honor the health-care needs and privacy of the families in the clinic, we would greatly appreciate if agents would be willing to wait outside.

For example, you can say:

° “I am now contacting a supervisor who can speak with you and apologize for declining to answer any additional questions.”
Other dos and don’ts

Follow all HIPAA guidelines for protecting patient privacy (do not release information about our patients)

Do not interfere with Immigration Agents:

- Do not lie
- Do not hide or conceal any person
- For instance, if immigration agents are asking about an individual who is actually in the building, staff should not say the person is not there – but can defer questions to the designated leads.

*Repeat*: Employees are not required to answer questions or provide information to immigration agents and are encouraged to defer questions to the Designated Leads.

(Designated Leads – such as supervisors & managers – have instructions for handling warrants.)
For providers

- Don’t give legal advice to your patients/clients.
- Make available “know your rights” pamphlets in waiting areas and service delivery rooms.
- You may advise clients that they have the right (option) to remain silent and do not have to answer any questions posed by immigration agents. BUT, employees should be careful not to direct clients not to speak to the agents, as this might be interpreted as interference.
- If possible, other clients should be asked to remain in a private room, with the door closed, until the situation has been resolved.
Why we are concerned

Fear of Deportation Makes Communities Less Healthy

People are afraid to drive,
afraid to use parks and exercise outdoors,
afraid to use public services like clinics
and afraid to get involved in their communities.
Why we are concerned

Fear of Deportation Makes Communities Less Safe

Deportation and the Threat of Deportation:

- **MAKE LAW ENFORCEMENT MORE DIFFICULT** - People who witness/are victims of a crime are less likely to report the crime or cooperate as witnesses if they fear deportation or questions about immigration status for themselves or someone they know.

- **MAKE VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE LESS LIKELY TO GO TO POLICE** - Domestic violence victims often remain with their abuser rather than risk being detained and/or deported when seeking protection from abuse.

- **EXACERBATE MENTAL ILLNESS & INSTABILITY** - Documented and undocumented immigrants experience exacerbated health conditions like stress, anxiety, and hopelessness due to fears of deportation for themselves or members of their community.
Creating a welcoming environment

- Post “All are Welcome” signs
- Make available “know your rights” pamphlets in waiting areas and service delivery rooms
- Ensure availability of trained interpreters (Public Health has phone interpreters available 24/7 at 206-535-2498)
If you have further questions about King County’s approach to immigrants, refugees and immigration enforcement, please contact:

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