

PROTECTING THE SAFETY AND HEALTH OF IMMIGRANT WORKERS

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

- Foreign-born workers are more likely to be employed in the higher-risk and lower-wage sectors of the workforce, such as agriculture, construction, and service industries.
- There are about 17 million foreign-born workers in the United States.
- Latin America is the region of birth for over half of foreign-born workers.
- While the total number of occupational fatalities in the United States continues to decrease, the 840 fatal work injuries reported for Hispanic workers in 2002 accounted for the second highest annual total for that population since 1992.

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

CDC is working to address the health and safety needs of immigrant workers through targeted efforts to reduce illnesses, injuries, and fatalities in the most hazardous sectors of the immigrant workforce.

Examples of Program in Action

- To better understand issues faced by immigrant agricultural workers, CDC collaborated with the Department of Labor to collect data on hired crop farm workers, most of whom are foreign-born, through the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS). NAWS is the only national study that has documented the living and working conditions of immigrant workers.
- In 2002, about 25% of fatal occupational injuries to foreign-born workers occurred to workers in construction trades. CDC is studying dry-wall work, the construction occupation that has the highest percentage of Hispanic workers, and has developed Spanish language survey and educational materials for preventing silicosis, a fatal disease affecting construction workers.
- In 2002, about 24% of fatal occupational injuries to foreign-born workers were due to homicides. CDC is evaluating the effectiveness of violence prevention strategies, such as panic buttons in taxi cabs, as well as various state-based approaches. CDC also is supporting studies on prevention of nonfatal injuries to immigrant workers, such as home healthcare aides and poultry workers.
- CDC has developed a Spanish-language website to better meet the needs of the growing Hispanic worker population, which is estimated to increase by more than one third over the next decade. The website, “NIOSH en Español,” provides resources in Spanish, including translations of selected CDC publications and links to other useful Spanish-language materials on occupational safety and health.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

CDC will continue to improve data collection, research, and communication methods to better address the language, cultural, social, and political challenges immigrant workers face. Increased understanding of the experiences and concerns of immigrant workers will help better tailor education and intervention programs to meet the needs of this diverse population.