

Characteristics of trafficking victims

To help identify victims in the emergency department or other healthcare setting, check for the following findings:

- scars or bruises (usually on the lower back), burns, brands, or unusual tattoos
- genital or reproductive trauma from repeated rape or amateur abortions
- strain injuries or exhaustion from forced hard labor
- poorly healed fractures
- signs of malnutrition, dehydration, poor general health, untreated disease, and poor dentition
- signs or symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder, such as extreme startle responses, guardedness, anxiety, and a self-protective posture
- very late entry (or no entry) into prenatal care.

Also suspect your patient is a trafficking victim if she or he:

- seems to be under surveillance at all times
- appears to fear a companion, yet relies totally on him or her
- is with a companion who won't leave the victim alone with a healthcare provider
- shows increased anxiety if the companion leaves the room (may ask "Who will take care of me now?")
- lacks identifying documents or the ability to pay for services
- has no clear means of supporting herself financially
- reports that someone else has his or her documents
- is reluctant to name or contact a family member
- doesn't speak English
- can't read or write.

Keep in mind, of course, that many immigrants and other foreigners can't read, write, or speak English and are accompanied to the hospital by companions who speak for them—yet aren't trafficking victims. So don't base your assessment solely on these characteristics.