

Mexico

Communication

Languages and Dialects

- Official spoken language: Spanish
- Among those who can read Spanish, literacy levels are lower for people ages 65 and older.
- Nearly all seasonal farm workers in the U.S. are Mexican-born; around 90 percent of seasonal farm workers report speaking little or no English.
- Educational materials written in English may not be an effective approach to ensuring treatment adherence.

Greetings

- Handshakes are a common form of greeting. Employ a lighter grip with both men and women.
- Smile and shake hands with each person present.
- Try for a moderate tone of voice. If you speak softly, people may believe you are signaling your lack of interest in the conversation.

Names and Titles

- Address a Mexican person with an appropriate title and last name. Wait to be invited before using a client's first name.
- Very often, Mexican people have two last names: the first is their father's last name, the second their mother's last name.
- Mexican people may shorten their last names, or they may choose to use just one last name.
- A woman may keep her two last names after she is married, without taking her new husband's last name.
- A woman may also choose to use her maiden name along with her married last name.
- A woman will often keep her maiden name on all of her legal documents while acknowledging her husband's last name in social situations.
- Sometimes a Mexican person will write their second last name as a single initial.

Non-Verbal Signals

- Mexican people may stand closely together as they talk; moving away is considered unfriendly.
- Some Mexican people may be intimidated by sustained eye contact; others may view it as a sign of challenge.
- During conversation, some people may nod as a sign of respect; this gesture does not necessarily imply agreement.
- Touching arms and shoulders and patting backs are common gestures.
- Once you have established rapport, you may receive an embrace.
- Withdrawing from affectionate gestures could be perceived as an insult.
- The 'okay' hand signal may be interpreted as vulgar.
- Placing your hands on your hips may be perceived as challenging or aggressive.
- Tossing paperwork onto a table may be considered offensive.
- Avoid putting hands in pockets while talking with a Mexican person.

Cultural Norms

Patient and Provider Interaction

- Some Mexican people may not adhere to standard concepts of time: they may be late, arrive at an unscheduled time, or miss appointments altogether.
- Individuals from Mexico expect a healthcare provider to be warm and attentive.
- If you correct a person from Mexico in front of others, then you may cause damage to the relationship.
- In some circumstances, people may avoid saying 'no' directly. They may answer a question with 'maybe' or 'we'll see' to avoid an outright 'no'.
- Men may respond to all questions asked in mixed company; they may also dominate conversation.
- In Mexico, many family decisions are made by either the father or by the eldest living male relative.
- Mothers are considered to be the family's most important source of emotional support.
- Women may appear to listen passively; they may also make less eye contact.

Visiting the Home

- Family members and close friends may drop by unannounced.
- Treat elderly people with great respect. Speak softly to them, and avoid disagreeing with them in conversation.
- Accept any food or drink offered to you in order not to appear ungrateful.
- Before you leave, take time for a proper goodbye. A quick exit may imply you did not enjoy your visit.

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Traditional Ideas and Beliefs

Beliefs About TB

Some Mexican patients may believe that tuberculosis could be a result of disrupting the body's hot/cold balance in one or more of the following ways:

- Getting wet
- Bathing or doing laundry in cold water
- Encountering an abrupt change in temperature
- Engaging in hard physical work
- Drinking to excess

Some people may attribute a TB diagnosis to one or more of the following:

- Smoking
- Inhaling ashes, dust, or smoke
- Worsening of a routine cold or bronchitis
- Malnutrition

Mexicans are aware that a persistent cough might indicate a TB diagnosis. However, because respiratory illnesses are prevalent in Mexico, TB symptoms may be initially interpreted as a minor respiratory illness, which could cause TB patients to delay seeking care.

Beliefs About TB Transmission

Some patients may believe that TB could be transmitted in one or more of the following ways:

- Shaking hands with an infected person
- Sharing eating utensils with an infected person
- Drinking from a bottle or glass used by an infected person
- Engaging in sexual relations with an infected person

Mexican people may not believe they are at high risk for contracting TB.

Stigma and TB

Stigma and stigmatizing practices continue to exist; however, do not assume all Mexican-born patients and their families will believe the misperceptions listed here.

People from Mexico may fear one or more of the following as a result of a TB diagnosis:

- Losing a job
- Losing housing
- Being condemned for spreading TB
- Being abandoned by or alienated from friends
- Being denied application for legal permanent resident status
- Being deported
- Consequently, some patients may attempt to hide their diagnoses or to stop medical treatment.
- TB is viewed by some as a disease affecting persons of lower social or economic status.
- Concerns regarding contagion often lead to social isolation of both TB patients and their families.

Treatment Considerations

Traditional Beliefs

- Some people may believe that good health is the result of either good behavior or good luck.
- Some may believe illnesses could have supernatural causes. In rural areas, they may believe bewitchment is the cause of TB.
- Some may classify diseases and remedies as either 'hot' or 'cold'.
- Some may also believe illness results from a 'dislocation' of different areas of the body.
- Some believe mal de ojo ('bad eye') can lead to illness, including extreme tiredness and severe headache.
- TB is sometimes perceived as a case of susto ('fright sickness'). Symptoms associated with susto include anxiety, depression, insomnia, introversion, irritability, lethargy, and anorexia. Susto is thought to be caused by a traumatic experience, and is believed to cause 'soul loss'.
- Mexican patients may resist blood draws because of a belief that the procedure may 'drain them of energy'.

Medication

- Some people may believe the Bacille Calmette-Guerin (BCG) vaccine prevents a range of illnesses other than TB.
- For the most part, Mexican people understand that TB can be cured with medication.
- Patients may obtain medications from Mexico.
- Within Mexico, many different kinds of medications can be purchased without a prescription.

Traditional Remedies

Some Mexican people, including members of indigenous groups, may use home remedies and other traditional curative practices in addition to prescribed treatments.

- To address imbalances in humors – which include hot, cold, wet, or dry qualities – people may consume food or medicine with the opposite quality: for example, 'hot' conditions are treated with medicine or food perceived to be 'cold' in nature.
- Some patients may delay seeking allopathic treatment while they wait for folk remedies to work.