

Report in Brief

Date: November 2020

Report No. A-04-20-02031



Why OIG Did This Audit

On July 1, 2019, the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations for Humanitarian Assistance and Security at the Southern Border Act, 2019 (P.L. 116-26) appropriated \$2.9 billion for the Unaccompanied Alien Children (UAC) Program. Title IV provided \$5 million for the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General (HHS-OIG), to conduct oversight of the UAC Program. On January 31, 2020, in response to the coronavirus pandemic in the United States, the Secretary of HHS declared a public health emergency. Following this declaration, Congress appropriated \$12 million to HHS-OIG to conduct oversight of HHS's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Previous HHS-OIG work has focused on the Office of Refugee Resettlement's (ORR's) efforts to ensure the health and safety of children in the UAC Program, including when the UAC Program experiences a sudden change in the number or needs of children. This report builds on our oversight of ORR's efforts to protect children and is one of two reports addressing emergency preparedness at ORR facilities. This report specifically addresses communicable disease preparedness.

Our objective was to determine whether ORR ensured that selected care provider facilities (facilities) followed ORR requirements in preparing for and responding to communicable diseases, such as COVID-19.

How OIG Did This Audit

We conducted this communicable disease preparedness audit of 11 selected facilities from March through June 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. Because most States were under stay-at-home orders, we sent questionnaires to the 11 selected facilities and requested documentation from each. We also interviewed ORR regarding its oversight responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Office of Refugee Resettlement Ensured That Selected Care Providers Were Prepared To Respond to the COVID-19 Pandemic

What OIG Found

ORR ensured that the 11 facilities we selected for review followed ORR requirements in preparing for and responding to communicable diseases and were prepared to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, ORR provided detailed COVID-19-response guidance, encouraged telehealth visits, and updated the UAC Portal.

The 11 selected facilities that we reviewed were generally prepared to respond to an emergency event, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, in accordance with Federal guidance. Specifically, they had policies and procedures, the capability to quarantine COVID-19 cases in their facilities, and adequate personal protective equipment.

ORR officials stated that, since 2006, ORR has had a policy in place that required its facilities to prepare for and respond to a communicable disease outbreak; therefore, the facilities were generally able to quickly pivot to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

What OIG Recommends and Administration for Children and Families Comments

This report contains no recommendations.

In response to our draft report, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) stated that ORR's standard operating procedures for communicable diseases follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) surveillance and outbreak guidelines for each specific disease. ACF also stated that ORR will continue to monitor the situation around COVID-19 and coordinate all response efforts with CDC and local public health officials. We included ACF's comments as an appendix to this report.