



2.1.2 The 'Healthy Immigrant Effect'



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Research on a broad sample of immigrants has shown that when immigrants arrive to Canada they are generally in better health than their Canadian born counterparts.¹ Even refugees, overall, have lower mortality rates than do Canadian citizens.¹ This is known as the 'healthy immigrant effect'.² It should be noted that the majority of Canadian research on the healthy immigrant effect has been on adults and not on children and youth. Whether or not this phenomenon occurs among younger Canadian newcomers should be examined.

Despite their initial relative good health, the health of immigrants often starts to decline sometime after their arrival to Canada. For example, research has found that those who had been living in Canada for 10 years or less had fewer chronic illnesses and less chance of disability than immigrants who had been living in Canada for longer and Canadian born citizens.³

Other research has shown that immigrants aged 20 to 59 years reported better health shortly after arrival to Canada than they did two years later.⁴ The greatest declines in self-reported health were among women and non-European immigrants (including West Asian, South Asian and Chinese individuals) as opposed to men and European immigrants.⁴

The cause or causes of this decrease in health status are not entirely known, but there are many possible explanations. For example:

- There may be inadequate policies and services to help immigrants settle and maintain optimal health in Canada.¹
- Immigrants are more likely to be affected by unemployment, poverty, and difficulty accessing services for various reasons including language barriers.¹
- Immigrants become exposed to the same stressors and pollutants as Canadians and may adopt unhealthy habits such as smoking, drinking alcohol, and eating unhealthy foods.¹

¹Beiser, M. (2005). *The Health of Immigrants and Refugees in Canada*. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 96 (2), S30-S44.; ²*Caring for Kids New to Canada*. (2013) *Adaptation and Acculturation*. <http://www.kidsnewtocanada.ca/culture/adaptation#resilience> ³Newbold, K.B., Danforth, J. (2003). *Health status and Canada's immigrant populations*. *Soc Sci Med*, 57, 1981-95.; ⁴Li-Ho, Kim, Carrasco, C., Muntaner, C., McKenzie, K., & Noh, S. (2013). *Ethnicity and Postmigration Health Trajectory in New Immigrants to Canada*. *American Journal of Public Health*, 103, (4), e96-e104.

