



University of Essex



# **A Guide to Health Clearance, Screening & Immunisation**

## **Occupational Health**

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# Introduction

Students who have applied to study health programmes are required to obtain Occupational Health (OH) clearance. This is in two parts: part one - health clearance questionnaire and part two - vaccination clearance. OH clearance is necessary to ensure that you are physically and mentally fit for all aspects of the course, and to protect the public who may be affected by your placement activities.

OH is concerned with the effect of your physical and mental health on work (placement) and the effect of work (placement) on your health. It is vital that we look at any potential risks you may be exposed to during your studies or when on placement in order to safeguard you by managing or reducing these risks as far as reasonably practicable. We will be responsible for your Occupational Health throughout your time at university.

## Data Protection

Medical records are retained electronically in accordance with best practice and Data Protection Regulations and will not be shown, nor their contents be shared, with anyone outside of OH – including University Placement Staff, Personal supervisors, Programme Lead or your GP – without your explicit consent. The only exception might be in the event of a court order for release of records in a judicial dispute. You can be provided with a copy of your OH vaccination record at any time on request.

## Confidentiality

OH is committed to maintaining your privacy, dignity and confidentiality at all times. We adhere to the principles of the Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR. You may speak to us confidentially about any health issue that you feel may affect you whilst you are on your course. We may advise you to share information with your University Department or Student Wellbeing Service if we feel that adjustments could be made that would help you during your studies.

We will not reveal any medical information that you have given us without your consent, unless we have good reason to believe that you, or another person, may be in danger.

# Health Questionnaire

By now you should have been forwarded an online health questionnaire to complete through our OH system, Cohort. If you not yet completed the questionnaire, please complete one today. The health questionnaire is the first part of the clearance process, and you will not be allowed to commence your course if you have not completed the health questionnaire. If you require a further copy, then please contact your course administration team. If you have any difficulties completing the questionnaire then please email [studentoh@essex.ac.uk](mailto:studentoh@essex.ac.uk).

You have a duty to provide all, relevant, truthful, and accurate information to OH and no information should be withheld. Any failure to do so may result in the offer of a place being withdrawn or reconsideration of your fitness to continue with the course. Dishonesty is incompatible with training in a regulated profession and may lead to you being removed from the course. Please ensure that you answer all questions truthfully.

Once the questionnaire has been completed and processed by OH, you should receive clearance to enrol on your chosen course, if you did not declare any health problems or support requirements, or if we assessed that your health condition would be unlikely to affect your ability to study and undertake your clinical placements.

If you have completed the questionnaire, but not have not yet received clearance, this could be because we are still processing it and/or you have declared a health condition that we may need to follow up. If this is the case, you will be informed of what further information we will need and we will need to obtain your consent for this further information. The reason that we may need to obtain more medical evidence is to ensure that you will be fit to undertake your course and that the appropriate support and/or adjustments can be facilitated by the University and the placements.

We may need to ask you to have an OH health assessment with an OH Clinician. This may be conducted by telephone, zoom or face to face at the OH clinic. Please be as honest as possible during this consultation. One of the main reasons for this consultation is to assess the impact of your health issues on your fitness to undertake the course and to advise the University (with your consent) of any reasonable adjustments or additional support you may require on the course. It is rare for us to recommend that an individual should not enrol on the course. In these rare exceptions, it is because we believe we cannot make modifications to enable you to safely undertake your clinical placement and meet the core competencies of the course.

**Student support** also provides information for students with long term health conditions or disabilities on how to access support directly. If you have already accessed this advice or been assessed for support prior to completing this questionnaire it would be helpful if you could attach a copy of the documentation.

In some cases, we may request for your written consent to write to your Doctor or Specialist for further information or advise a referral to a Specialist OH Physician.

# Vaccination Criteria for placement clearance

The second part of the course and placement clearance process is to ensure that you have undergone any blood screening required and received the vaccinations as recommended by the Department of Health.

In order for you to be able to attend clinical/work placements, all Health Care Students will require vaccination clearance from OH.

You will not be fully cleared for placement until we are certain that you have had the necessary vaccinations or blood tests. There is no charge for this service, so it is beneficial to you that you attend your vaccination appointments; not only to gain your placement clearance, but also to prevent you having to pay privately for any vaccinations or blood tests in the event that you do not attend your OH appointments.

OH, will need proof of Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR vaccination) dates, Chicken Pox history or vaccination, proof of BCG vaccination (if you have had one) and proof of Hepatitis B vaccination (unlikely for most) if you have already had this. We will also need to see any evidence of covid vaccinations. Further details about these immunisations and vaccinations and are below.

Once you have finished reading this guide, we *strongly recommend* that you begin to collect your vaccination history documentation - this information will need to be emailed to OH or attached to your questionnaire.

If you have received vaccinations from your GP or another OH service, you will need to provide us with evidence of your vaccinations/blood test results. Your clearance will be processed much more quickly if you provide us with your vaccination history before you start the course.

Please provide evidence of your childhood vaccinations such as from red/yellow baby book and/or a printout from your GP as this may save you from requiring further vaccinations. If you are from overseas and you do not have a record of your childhood vaccinations, please do not worry, we will discuss the option of carrying out a blood test to check immunity where necessary.

If you have worked in healthcare before and know that you have evidence of immunity to Hepatitis B, Measles, Rubella, Varicella (chicken pox) and Tuberculosis (BCG), please forward a copy of your evidence to us.

If you are not able to email your vaccination history or attach it to your OH health questionnaire you will *need* to bring your vaccination history to your first vaccination appointment.

A delay in supplying OH with your vaccination documentation will delay your health clearance and first placement. Our email address for vaccination documentation is [studentoh@essex.ac.uk](mailto:studentoh@essex.ac.uk)

OH will inform the placement team that you are fit for placement once you have met the following criteria:

- At least two doses of the Hepatitis B vaccine OR evidence of immunity via a blood test
- At least one dose of the MMR vaccine OR evidence of immunity to measles and rubella via a blood test
- History of the Chicken pox virus or at least one dose of the Varicella vaccine OR evidence of immunity to Varicella (Chickenpox) via a blood test
- TB screened
- Exposure Prone Procedure (EPP) screening (Oral Health students only and some nursing students – please see page 12)

**Without the fitness for placement certificate, you will not be able to start your clinical placement, to avoid the delay of your placement, you must attend your vaccination appointments. Your vaccination status is shared with your school so to keep them updated at all times of your status.**

## Referrals

Some students may be referred to see OH during their time at university. The purpose of the appointment is to assess whether any health conditions may impact upon practice and whether a student will need adjustments to help them on placement.

We will make recommendations where required and we may arrange for you to be seen by the OH Physician if the OH clinician considers it to be appropriate.

If you feel that you may need further assistance whilst on placement, or if you have concerns about your physical or mental health you should speak to your personal tutor in the first instance, who may then suggest a referral for an assessment to OH.

# Consent

After an OH referral appointment, you will be asked to provide your consent before we send your report to your tutor. You may choose to release the report without prior viewing, and you will then be emailed a copy for your own records.

You are also entitled to see a copy of the report before it is sent. It is important to note that the purpose of prior viewing is to correct any factual inaccuracies, not to alter the opinion of the OH Nurse, Advisor or Physician. You will be required to provide consent to the report within 48 hours. If we do not hear from you within 48 hours, we will advise the referring course tutor that you have not provided consent to release the report.

Any delay in receiving your consent could result in you being asked to interrupt your placement whilst the University considers your fitness to practice and/or study in the absence of an OH report.

# Additional information

Occasionally we may need to write to your GP or specialist for additional information. We will ask you to provide your written consent to allow us to do so. It can take 6-8 weeks for specialist reports to be issued therefore any specialist reports that you may already have may be useful in the interim. Please forward these if asked to do so by the OH clinicians.

# Adjustments

OH is an advisory service, and you should note that we cannot tell the University what to do – we can only make recommendations. If OH advises adjustments, the operational decision on the feasibility and implementation of any adjustments ultimately rests with your department and the placement providers and support and information can be obtained through the [Accessibility Advisers](#) within Student Wellbeing. Consideration will be given to the provisions of the Equality Act 2010, best practice standards as well as the core competencies of your course. The Equality Act 2010 defines a disability as a physical or mental condition that has a substantial and long-term effect on your ability to carry out your daily activities.

Decisions will be based on the individual's needs and whether any adjustments would be reasonable within the placement setting. The University and placement providers will need to consider health and safety factors, patient safety and the protection of the public.



# Future appointments

Appointments will either be face to face on campus or via telephone or zoom. Where possible appointments will be arranged to accommodate your timetable so you can attend. Lecturers and tutors are aware of the requirement to attend these appointments and should allow you to do so.

Please be aware that we will inform your course leads if you fail to attend 2 booked OH appointments and this could also affect your eligibility of being offered further appointments.

Some students have jeopardised the start of their placements by not engaging with OH. It is your responsibility to ensure that you cooperate with all OH procedures. Do not leave the process until the last minute and make sure that you check your emails and voicemail regularly. If we do not hear from you after two attempts to contact you, we will notify your course lead.

Please ensure that your online health questionnaire is completed as soon as possible and that you have located all of your vaccination records. Failure to complete the OH process means failure to comply with the requirements of your course and will therefore result in you not being able to start your course.

For all OH student enquires please email [studentoh@essex.ac.uk](mailto:studentoh@essex.ac.uk)

# Immunisations and blood screening

As a Health and Social care (HSC) or Sport, Rehabilitation and Exercise Science student (SRES), you must comply with the Department of Health guidelines on immunisations and screening required to protect you and your patients during the course of your work.

- Immunisation is the process whereby a person is made immune or resistant to an infectious disease, typically by the administration of a vaccine
- Vaccination is the administration of a vaccine to stimulate an individual's Immune system to develop immunity to a specific disease

We require you to be vaccinated for some infectious diseases if you do not already have immunity to them. Whilst we cannot force you to have a vaccination it may affect you undertaking a clinical placement without appropriate vaccinations and therefore the placement settings may not accept you onto the placement.

## Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is a virus that affects the liver. It may start as an acute disease, causing a mild illness that lasts for a few weeks, or it can be a severe illness leading to death. For some people the Hepatitis B virus lingers, causing a lifelong chronic illness that may result in long term liver problems such as cirrhosis or liver cancer.

Hepatitis B is spread when infected blood, semen, or other bodily fluid enters the body. An infected mother can pass the disease on to her child at birth. You can also get the disease by:

- Having unprotected sex with an infected partner
- Sharing needles, syringes, or other drug paraphernalia
- Using a vessel that may contain an infected person's blood, such as a razor or toothbrush

In healthcare, you may come into contact with infected blood whilst providing care to patients or through sharps, splash, or a needle stick injury. Many people who are a carrier of Hepatitis B have no symptoms at all and are not aware they are a carrier.

It takes only a microscopic amount of blood to transmit the virus. The virus can also live outside the body on used instruments and hard surfaces for up to a week. The best protection against developing Hepatitis B is to be vaccinated against the virus as it is very infectious, there is up to a 30% chance of

acquiring the virus from an infected carrier if you become exposed. It is therefore essential that all healthcare workers be vaccinated against Hepatitis B.

## **How effective is the vaccine and is it safe?**

The vaccine for Hepatitis B is highly effective. The majority of adults who receive one dose develop protective levels of antibodies within one month of receiving a single dose. It is important, however, to complete the course of three vaccinations and have a blood test afterwards to ensure immunity is achieved.

As with all medications, there is the potential for side-effects, but the safety record of the vaccine is outstanding. The most common side effect of the Hepatitis B vaccine is soreness at the injection site. Since 1982, when the Hepatitis B vaccine became available, more than 100 million people have been vaccinated. In that same time period, the incidence of acute Hepatitis B declined by about 82%.

Serious side effects include a severe allergic reaction within a few minutes of receiving the vaccination, but such occurrences are extremely rare. To date the University OH service has not yet had an individual who has had a severe reaction to the HEP B vaccine.

## **Vaccination schedule**

The course of Hep B requires three vaccines. You will have the first dose at your first appointment, the second after one month and the third after six months. A minimum of six weeks after the third vaccination, you will require a blood test to ensure you have responded to the vaccination. In some cases, a booster vaccination is required as immunity levels are not quite sufficient. Some people simply do not respond to the vaccination and do not develop immunity. If you do not respond to the first course of Hep B, we will repeat the course accelerated. However, if you do not respond to the accelerated course then no more vaccines will be necessary. It is important to identify these people so we can advise what to do if you were exposed to a patient who has Hepatitis B. We will also notify the school of anyone who is a non-responder to the Hep B vaccine

**You cannot start placement until you have had at least TWO doses.**

## **Chickenpox (varicella)**

You must be immune to chickenpox as it is important to protect you and patients from this, particularly those who have cancer, are immunocompromised or are pregnant.

We need to have history that you have had chickenpox (normally from when you were very young) OR a copy of a blood test result demonstrating you have immunity OR evidence of vaccination. If you have no history or evidence of immunity, we will take a blood test to ascertain this. We will notify you if you need vaccination if you are susceptible.

## **Vaccination schedule**

Students that do not have immunity to chickenpox will require two vaccines given at 6 week intervals. **You cannot start placement until you have had at least ONE dose.** Further blood tests are not required following vaccination.

# **Measles, mumps and rubella (MMR)**

We need to ensure you are immune to measles and rubella so that you do not transmit this to patients and we need to ensure we protect you from acquiring it whilst on your clinical placement.

We need to see documentary evidence of receiving two MMR vaccinations or a blood test demonstrating you have immunity to measles and rubella. This is often shown on your GP record or in your baby book. If a blood test is required and you are immune to rubella and measles you are considered likely to be immune to mumps and therefore, we will not require you to be screened for mumps.

Everyone is entitled to receive two doses of MMR vaccine, as it is part of the national Public Health schedule for immunisations. Therefore, you may choose to attend your GP practice instead to obtain these vaccinations in advance of enrolment. The GP should not charge you for this service.

## **Vaccination schedule**

Students that do not have immunity to measles or rubella will require two vaccines given at one-month intervals. **You cannot start placement until you have had at least ONE dose.** Further blood tests are not required following vaccination.

# Tuberculosis (TB)

We need to ensure you are screened for TB infection before you attend placement. The Vaccination against TB does not necessarily make you immune but provides you with some protection; we cannot say how much and for how long, but it is thought to be around fifteen years to a lifetime in some cases.

We will firstly be looking for evidence of a BCG scar (likely to be on your left upper arm) or evidence from your GP immunisation record that you have had the BCG vaccination. All students will be required to complete a TB symptom screening which you will find in your pre course health questionnaire. This will help us to identify which students may require a blood test for TB infection such as new students who have been living or working overseas for more than three months in a high incidence TB country. These are listed by the Health Protection Agency – go to [www.hpa.org.uk](http://www.hpa.org.uk) and search for 'WHO country data TB'.

If you do not have a BCG scar, we will arrange for you to have a Mantoux skin test (or a blood test if you have recently arrived from a country with high rates of TB). The results of these tests will help decide if you will be offered a BCG vaccination. Prior to the Mantoux test appointment you will be asked to complete an additional health questionnaire and consent to attend the Mantoux/BCG appointment. This is because certain health conditions, for example someone who is immunosuppressed or pregnant are contraindications of having the vaccine. The BCG is not normally carried out for anyone over 35 however if you have not had the BCG and would like to then you can discuss this with the nurse

**IMPORTANT:** When you are invited for your Mantoux test we will inform you of two dates for your appointments. The first will be for the Mantoux test and a second appointment 48 to 72 hours later to check the result of the Mantoux test. Where appropriate, you will be offered a BCG vaccination. **You MUST attend both appointments, failure to attend these scheduled appointments may result in you being charged for the wasted test and vaccine.** We CANNOT arrange a one-off Mantoux appointment. It is therefore important that you attend on the dates you are given.

# Covid 19 Vaccination

As a University OH service, we have been asked by the hospital trusts to pass on a student's covid vaccination status to the placements team as part of your covid risk assessment. Therefore, please ensure you obtain a copy from either your GP record or from the NHS app to provide to OH. (Please note we do not accept the covid vaccine cards)

# Live vaccines

Some students are unable to have live vaccines because of pregnancy, certain types of medication or health conditions or other contraindications. Please ensure you take a list of your medications to your appointment. If you are unable to have a live vaccine, we will review your health clearance to assess whether adjustments can be made so that you can continue on your course.

# Oral Health & Nursing students EPP clearance

Oral Health students will be undertaking Exposure Prone Procedure (EPP) work during their training and will need to be screened for HIV, Hepatitis C and Hepatitis B surface antigen, in accordance with Department of Health regulations. If you require a blood test for EPP screening, you will need to provide photographic ID such as a driving licence, passport or your Universities ID card at the time of the blood test. We cannot take the blood test without photographic ID. Failure to have correct ID at the clinic may cause delays to your clearance.

If you do not have evidence of screening (this would need to be an Identified Validated Sample (IVS)) the blood test will be carried out at the very start of your course before you start your clinical placement. Therefore it is very important that you attend for your blood test and bring with you the necessary identification. Delay to the EPP clearance will mean that you **cannot** carry out any EPP work whilst on placement. Sometimes students arrange the test before they start their course but be mindful as this can be expensive, so if you don't have evidence already then you can book the blood test with OH.

Nursing students may be required to carry out EPP work if on a theatre placement. Therefore a blood test will be arranged for you via OH prior to you starting your placement

# HIV test

All healthcare students have a professional responsibility to ensure that they are well enough to work in clinical practice and report any symptoms suggestive of a communicable disease or any known diagnosis. For many courses, a diagnosis of HIV is not a barrier to training and OH are obliged professionally and ethically to maintain confidentiality.

All students are offered the opportunity to have a HIV test. Simply ask the nurse for a test.

## **Hepatitis C test**

For many courses, a diagnosis of Hepatitis C is not a barrier to training and OH are obliged professionally and ethically to maintain confidentiality.

All students are offered the opportunity to have a Hepatitis C test. Simply ask the nurse for a test.

## **Meningitis**

Rates of Meningitis W are increasing, especially in new university entrants. All students under the age of 25 are eligible for a free MenACWY vaccination. Please contact your GP surgery for vaccination. This is not available through OH.

## **Needle phobia**

We know that many students may be anxious when they attend clinic. Please make sure that you have plenty to eat and drink before attending and tell the nurse if you are anxious or have a needle phobia. In many clinics we have a couch available for you to lie on whilst having injections or blood tests.

Please also wear a short sleeve top to enable us to access your upper arm easily for vaccination and taking blood.

## **Sharps and splash injuries**

During your time as a student, you may sustain an accidental splash, bite or sharps injury. This can be very frightening; however, it is very important that you report any injury. You will not be blamed for what happened. If you have a splash or sharps injury you should follow this procedure:

- Wash the puncture wound liberally with soap and water immediately and encourage bleeding. Cover the wound with a waterproof dressing.

- Exposed mucous membranes including conjunctivae should be immediately irrigated with water. The eyes should be irrigated before and after removing any contact lenses.
- Inform your mentor or practice supervisor about the incident.
- The source patient should be identified and, if possible, arrangements made for a blood sample to be obtained, with informed consent. This process will be managed by a senior member of staff.
- Complete the local Accident/Incident reporting form.
- Attend the nearest Emergency Department/ minor injuries unit where you will have a blood test
- If the injury happened during office hours (9am to 5pm Monday to Friday) then email OH to inform us. It is important that all injuries are reported immediately so that our nurse can perform a risk assessment over the phone and assess whether all appropriate actions have been carried out.
- If the injury happened outside office hours, or at the weekend then call us on the next working day to arrange a follow-up appointment.

If the source patient has HIV you may be able to take some medication called PEP (Post Exposure Prophylaxis). We will advise you whether we think this may be indicated at the time of our risk assessment. There is no post exposure treatment for Hepatitis C.

Following the risk assessment we will arrange for a serum save as soon as possible. This does not test for infection but is used as a comparison if any of the follow up tests are positive for infection. We will then test for HIV at three months and Hepatitis C at six months after the injury. We may also check for presence of Hepatitis B infection. Initial blood tests will be performed in the nearest ED but all follow-up blood tests if needed will be undertaken in the OH department at the University.