## Contents

**Occupational Health Student Clearance Guidance**

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Introduction

Students who have applied to study health programmes are required to obtain Occupational Health (OH) clearance. This in two parts: part one – pre-course clearance and part two - placement 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 needs throughout your studies at Essex.

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 your School/Department, the Placements team, your placement provider or your GP – without your explicit consent. The only exceptions might be in the event of a court order for release of records in a judicial dispute, or when there is a high risk to your safety or the safety of others. You can request to be provided with a copy of your OH vaccination record at any time.

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 School/Department or Student Wellbeing 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.
Part 1) Pre-Course Clearance

The first part of the clearance process is an online health questionnaire. You will be emailed with details on how to access this through our OH system, Cority. Completing this questionnaire is mandatory for course clearance and must be completed prior to you commencing your course. Please note that you will need to provide your vaccination history - see the next section for more details.

If you do not complete the questionnaire, you will not be able to receive clearance to commence your course, or for the second stage of clearance to enable you to attend placement. If you have not received a questionnaire but have registered as a student, or have any difficulties completing the questionnaire, please contact Occupational Health by emailing 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 you have submitted the questionnaire, it will be reviewed by the OH team. Following this, you will either receive clearance to commence your chosen course, or you will be contacted to arrange an appointment with a member of the OH clinical team. This appointment will be either over the phone, on zoom, or in person, and will be 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 placement provider. If an appointment is required, you will be advised if we need any further information from you.

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. 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 our OH Physician.

It is rare for us to recommend that an individual should not continue on the course. In these rare exceptions, it is because all viable options have been considered and we (in consultation with your School) believe we cannot recommend or accommodate modifications to enable you to safely undertake your clinical placement and meet the core competencies of the course.

The Student Wellbeing and Inclusivity Service (SWIS) also provide 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.
Part 2) Placement Clearance

The second part of the clearance process is to ensure that you have received the vaccinations and undergone relevant blood screening as recommended by the Department of Health. All students undertaking a clinical placement will require vaccination clearance from OH prior to the start of their first placement.

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 test.

You will need to provide evidence of the following:

- Date(s) of Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccination(s) or blood tests to show immunity to Measles and Rubella. A full course of MMR consists of two vaccinations.

- Date(s) of Varicella (chickenpox) vaccination(s), or verbal/written confirmation from yourself that you have previously had the chicken pox infection (this does not require proof or dates).

- Date of BCG (tuberculosis) vaccination or Mantoux test if you have had one.

- Date(s) of Hepatitis B vaccination(s) if you have had any. Some countries offer immunisation in childhood but anyone who has worked in healthcare should already have been vaccinated.

Most will have had some or all of the above vaccinations as a child, so may have evidence from childhood vaccination records, such as from red/yellow baby book and/or a printout from your GP. Those who have worked in healthcare previously should be able to obtain records from their previous employer/OH provider if applicable.

If you are not able to obtain a record of your childhood vaccinations, please do not worry - the nurse can offer further MMR vaccination if no evidence can be provided. You should ensure whilst you are contacting your GP that you are fully up to date with your childhood vaccinations/boosters including Tetanus, Polio, Diphtheria and Pertussis (Whooping Cough). If you are not, you should arrange these boosters through your GP service.

If you do not have evidence of any of these, OH are able to provide blood tests and/or vaccinations to ensure you are immune.

Your clearance will be processed much more quickly if you provide us with your vaccination history before you start the course, preferably attached to your health questionnaire. If you are unable to do this, please email your records to studentoh@essex.ac.uk. If you are not able to email your vaccination history or attach it to your OH health questionnaire you need to bring your records to your first OH appointment. Any delay in supplying OH with your vaccination documentation will delay your health clearance and first placement.
For Apprenticeship students only:

Students on apprenticeships who are already working in healthcare should have already been screened for the above by their employer. We ask you to request your vaccination history from your employer’s Occupational Health Service and submit it with your questionnaire. If there are any outstanding vaccinations, please request this through the OH department of your employer as they will have all your records and need to know you are up to date in line with guidance for healthcare worker clearance. If they are unable to give you the required vaccinations for any reason, please let us know so we can arrange for you to receive them. Please also send in evidence of your childhood vaccinations also which may be requested from your GP.

For apprentices in non-healthcare settings, please write this clearly on your questionnaire, or let us know via email, and we will be able to arrange an appointment for you.

Placement Clearance Criteria

You will be given placement clearance once you have met the following minimum 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 previous blood test
- History of Chickenpox (Varicella) infection OR at least one dose of the Varicella vaccine OR evidence of immunity to Varicella via a blood test
- Screened for Tuberculosis (TB) infection – minimum of symptom overview and scar check. As part of this we may offer you a blood test (IGRA) or Mantoux test if you do not have evidence that you have already been immunised against TB. If needed, we will then offer the immunisation BCG to protect you against TB in the clinical setting.
- Exposure Prone Procedure (EPP) screening (Applies to Oral Health students and some nursing students – please see page 12)

Your course and placement clearance status are shared with your course admin and placement lead, but please be advised they will not be able to access any of your OH records.

You will not be able to start your clinical placement without clearance. To avoid any delays with starting your placement, you must attend your Occupational Health appointments.
Immunisations and blood screenings

As a student with a clinical placement, 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. For students more at risk due to not being able to have or declining a vaccination, we will need to inform the School that a risk assessment needs to be carried out, so you do not end up putting yourself or your patients at risk. This may limit where you can attend 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, splashes, or a needle stick injury. Many people who are a carrier of Hepatitis B have no symptoms at all and may not be 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 contracting 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 some protective levels of antibodies within one month of receiving a single dose. It is important, however, to complete the course of three vaccinations at the recommended intervals to provide optimum immunity and have a blood test afterwards to ensure an adequate level of 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, Occupational Health at Essex have not had any 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 4 weeks later, and the third six months after the first dose. 4-6 weeks after the third dose 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. However, if you do not respond to the repeated course, no more vaccines will be offered. It is important to identify non-responders to advise what to do if receiving a sharps or splash injury relating to a patient who has Hepatitis B. Please be advised that being a non-responder is not a barrier to you going on placement however you should ensure you should gain an assessment immediately in the case of a sharps injury and inform the clinician carrying out the risk assessment of your non responder status.

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.

Students travelling from some countries abroad may need to have a blood test to confirm their immunity.
**Vaccination schedule**

Students that do not have immunity to chickenpox will require two vaccines, 4 weeks apart. **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 to ensure we protect you from acquiring it whilst on your clinical placement.

We need to see evidence of you receiving two MMR vaccinations or a previous blood test demonstrating you have immunity to measles and rubella. This is often shown on your GP record or in your baby book. If you are not able to obtain evidence and a blood test is required, assuming 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 4 weeks apart **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. There is little evidence relating to the efficacy of immunisation against TB over the age of 35yrs.

We will firstly be looking for evidence of a BCG scar (likely to be on your left upper arm if given in the UK) but site may vary in other countries) 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 those who have been living or working overseas for more than three months in a high incidence TB country, as defined in the UK Health Security Agency report.

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 to having the vaccine.

**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.

**Live vaccines**

Some students are unable to have live vaccines (MMR, Varicella, BCG) 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. Your School will need to conduct a risk assessment to ensure that on placement you are not working in areas where you or others will be more vulnerable.
Exposure Prone Procedures

Oral Health students will be undertaking Exposure Prone Procedure (EPP) work during their placements and will need to be screened for current infections of HIV, Hepatitis C and Hepatitis B, 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, in addition to your University 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 marked as 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 by OH. 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, in these cases a blood test will be arranged for you via OH prior to you starting your placement.
Further vaccinations and testing

HIV testing

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 can request a test from the OH nurse at the immunisation appointment.

Hepatitis C testing

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 can request a test from the OH nurse at the immunisation appointment.

Hepatitis B testing

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

All students can request a test from the OH nurse at the immunisation appointment.

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, as this is not available through OH.
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 require medication called PEP (Post Exposure Prophylaxis). We will advise you whether we think this may be indicated at the time of our risk assessment however, in such instances the first port of call should be A&E. 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 Accident & Emergency Department but all follow-up blood tests if needed will be undertaken in the OH department at the University.
Referrals

Some students may be referred by their tutor or course leader to see OH during their degree. The purpose of the referral is to assess whether any health conditions may impact upon practice and whether a student will need adjustments to help them during their course and/or on placement. The appointment will be with one of the Occupational Health Clinical team, and will be via telephone, on Zoom or in person at either Colchester or Southend. The clinician will make recommendations where required and, in some cases, may arrange for you to be seen by an external OH Physician if required for further support.

If you feel that you may need assistance whilst studying or 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 to OH. Referrals cannot be made without your knowledge and consent. We also cannot accept self-referrals.

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 Clinician or Physician. You will be required to provide consent to release 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 your placement being paused 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.

If following assessment with Occupational Health prior to or during the course, adjustments are recommended for you attending placements, we will, with your consent inform your personal tutor and placements team of these adjustments in writing.

**Occupational Health 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 and sent them to OH. 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).
Frequently Asked Questions

Vaccinations & Blood tests

What do I have to bring to my Occupational Health appointment?
For your first appointment, please bring all documentation evidencing any previous immunisation history. If you are an oral health student you will need to bring official ID, passport, or driving licence to all appointments. All students should bring their ID lanyards with them to appointments.

What do I do if I cannot attend my appointment?
Please email OH as soon as possible if you are unable to a scheduled date or time and we shall try to accommodate your request and offer your appointment to another student.

I cannot find my vaccination history, what do I do?
Contact your GP for all immunisations on your NHS records, and if already working in healthcare contact your Occupational Health department for any records held on file. If you are unable to access your vaccination history, please discuss this with the nurse at your appointment.

I have a needle phobia/faint when having my blood taken, what do I do?
We know that many students may be anxious when they attend clinic. If you have had problems before, please inform us by e-mail when you are offered your appointment so that additional time may be allocated for your appointment. Please make sure that you have plenty to eat and drink before attending and tell the nurse on the day of your appointment if you are anxious or have a needle phobia. We have a reclining chair, so you can lie down whilst having injections or blood tests and we can allow more time.

If you need to, you can bring someone into your appointment for support.

I would like to refuse a vaccination – what happens next?
Occupational Health cannot force anyone to have a vaccination or blood test, however your School will be asked by OH to undertake a risk assessment as we will need to advise them that you have not met the minimum standards for OH clearance. This may impact on your studies and placement options.

Can I still have a vaccine if I do not feel well?
Please let OH know what symptoms you have so that we can assess if your appointment can go ahead. For example, if you have a fever it is likely that a vaccination would be rescheduled.
Referrals

Why do I need a referral?
A referral is usually needed for anyone with a health condition (short or long-term) which they may need adjustments for during their placement. You may also be referred if you are having difficulties with engagement on your course or placement. You can only be referred by your tutor or course lead with your consent – you have to have seen the referral first, or agreed to see it at the same time.

What happens during the referral appointment?
During the referral, you will be asked about the specific reasons for referral, your mental and physical wellbeing, past medical history and current treatments/adjustments for any health condition. This can take up to an hour and you should allocate yourself time and a confidential location to take the call if it is by phone or Zoom.

What happens after a referral appointment?
Following your referral appointment, the clinician will write a report which will summarise what was discussed and answer the questions provided on the referral.

Who gets to see the report?
You will be offered the opportunity to see the report before it is sent to anyone, to confirm details are correct.
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