



# Infectious Diseases and Immunisation Procedure

For student placements in the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences

As you prepare to undertake your student placement, it is important to understand that there is a risk that infection may occur between you and your patients, clients or other contacts. In the course of your student placement, you might be exposed to potentially serious infectious agents (eg through direct contact with an infectious patient, visitor or colleague or indirectly through a contaminated surface or environment). You might also pose a risk to others if you have an infectious condition that is capable of being transmitted as you perform your duties. These risks cannot be totally eliminated, but the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences takes the prevention of infectious disease transmission very seriously and expects that all students will take adequate steps to protect themselves and others from infection.

This document outlines the Faculty's adopted procedure for minimising infection transmission during student placements. It is designed to be read in conjunction with the *Student Placements Handbook* and has been established in consideration of currently accepted guidelines, including:

- Australian Immunisation Handbook
- Victorian Department of Health and Human Services '*Vaccination for healthcare workers*'

The Faculty's adopted procedure for immunisation and infectious disease testing is designed to satisfy the requirements of the majority of student placement providers, however some organisations may require additional immunisations, tests or documentation.

## The Infectious Diseases and Immunisation Declaration

This document outlines the minimum obligations of students in relation to infection prevention and contains two parts that must be completed **annually** before the deadline.

### Part A: Student Details & Declaration

This section details your minimum obligations in relation to infection prevention and how the personal information you provide will be used by the University. You must complete all of the fields at the top of the section, read the terms carefully and sign at the bottom to declare your acceptance of them. The terms may change from year to year, so you must resign this document each year.

### Part B: Medical Practitioner Statement

This section must be completed annually by a medical practitioner who is registered in Australia. It constitutes a formal statement about your infection and immunisation status regarding a number of transmissible conditions.

The medical practitioner should tick each statement that they believe is true and leave all other statements unmarked. Where necessary, additional information should be provided in a typed letter (on letterhead).

**Where possible, students should aim to satisfy all of the tests and vaccinations contained in Part B, as they represent the minimum requirement for students being accepted for placement with most providers.**

Once your medical practitioner has completed Part B, you must both sign the declaration at the bottom of the page to confirm that you each believe it to be a true and accurate record of your current infection and immunisation status.

## Pregnancy and breastfeeding

Some vaccinations are not generally recommended for pregnant or breastfeeding women due to an increased risk to both mother and child. You should consult with your doctor regarding this and they should provide a typed statement on letterhead advising your situation and the risks associated with undertaking placement activity, which you should submit along with the completed and signed Infectious Diseases and Immunisation Declaration.

If you are temporarily unable to be fully immunised according to the placement provider's requirements, your placement might be adjusted or delayed to reduce the risk of infection.

## Allergy or non-seroconversion

In some cases, students are unable to satisfy some of the immunisation requirements due to a vaccine allergy or other biological reason resulting in chronic non-seroconversion. In these cases, your doctor should provide a typed statement on letterhead that details your circumstances and the risks associated with undertaking placement activity, which you should submit along with the completed and signed Infectious Diseases and Immunisation Declaration.

The University will communicate this information to your placement provider(s) who will in turn make a determination about whether or not they are willing to accept you for placement based on the health and safety risks. The University will make every effort to source suitable placements, and a staff member from your department will discuss with you further regarding any possible impacts on your studies.

## Conscientious objection

The University strongly recommends that all students are fully immunised prior to undertaking placement, but also respects the decision of some students to not accept vaccination. If you are not fully immunised according to the placement provider's requirements, you may not be permitted to undertake placement. The University will attempt to find you a suitable alternative placement but cannot guarantee that this will be possible in all cases. If sufficient placement is not completed, you may be unable to complete your course.

# Information about the diseases

The following information has been summarised from the Australian Immunisation Handbook, the Victorian immunisation for healthcare workers guidelines, and the Victoria State Government's Better Health Channel website.

You should seek professional medical advice for further information regarding any of these diseases.

## Diphtheria

Diphtheria is a serious bacterial disease that causes severe inflammation of the nose, throat and windpipe (trachea). It is most commonly spread when someone ingests or inhales the cough or sneeze droplets from an infected person. Symptoms occur between two and 10 days following infection, and around 10 per cent of people exposed to diphtheria die from the disease.

The best prevention against diphtheria is immunisation. The Victorian immunisation for healthcare workers guidelines state that a booster dose of dTpa vaccine is recommended if 10 years have elapsed since a previous dose, and this is a requirement of most placement providers.

More information: [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/diphtheria](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/diphtheria)

## Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is a viral disease that affects the liver. People can be infected with hepatitis A if they have direct contact with food, drinks or objects contaminated by the faeces of an infected person. You can fall ill any time between 15 and 50 days after catching the virus, though many infected people show few or no symptoms.

Immunisation is the best protection against hepatitis A infection and is recommended for health and childcare workers. Most of our placement providers require that Nursing students are immunised against hepatitis A, and recommend it for students of all other health disciplines.

More information: [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/hepatitis-a](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/hepatitis-a)

## Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is a viral infection that can lead to serious illness or death. You can get hepatitis B from any activity where the blood or body fluids of an infected person enter your own bloodstream. The virus may also be passed from a pregnant mother to her baby. Some people may experience mild, flu-like symptoms and some will show no symptoms at all. Most adults who have hepatitis B recover completely and do not require ongoing treatment, however children with hepatitis B are more likely to develop liver disease or cancer in later life.

Immunisation is the best protection against hepatitis B. For adults, the vaccine is typically given in a 3-dose schedule over a six month period. 1-2 months after the final dose, you must be tested to ensure that immunity has been granted. Many placement providers will accept students who have commenced but not yet completed their course of vaccination, however you should endeavour to complete the course as early as possible to minimise the risk of infection.

More information: [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/hepatitis-b](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/hepatitis-b)

## Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C is a blood-borne virus that causes inflammation of the liver. It is transferred through blood-to-blood contact. Many people do not feel ill when first infected with hepatitis C, however some people might experience flu-like symptoms or jaundice.

There is currently no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C infection, but treatments are available that can help decrease inflammation of the liver, minimise long-term complications and possibly prevent transmission to others. Students must be tested for hepatitis C infection annually.

More information: [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/hepatitis-c](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/hepatitis-c)

## Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)

The human immunodeficiency virus weakens the immune system and, if not treated, eventually causes acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS). When the immune system is weakened, a person is more susceptible to various infections and cancers. It is transferred through the sharing of bodily fluids, most commonly by sexual intercourse without a condom.

There is currently no vaccine to prevent HIV infection, nor is there a cure. Treatments and medications are available to help people control the virus and stay healthy for much longer, but they do not work equally as well for everyone and they can have side effects. Students must be tested for HIV infection annually.

More information: [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/hiv-and-aids](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/hiv-and-aids)

## Influenza (Flu)

The flu is a highly contagious viral infection that can cause severe illness and life-threatening complications, including pneumonia. The influenza virus is spread by contact with fluids from coughs and sneezes. Most adults are infectious for up to seven days after becoming sick with the flu, so it is best to avoid contact with other people while you are unwell. It is estimated that the flu contributes to over 3,000 deaths in Australia each year.

The influenza virus has a unique ability to change its surface structure, so annual vaccination against the latest version of the flu is strongly recommended by most placement providers and required by others. Vaccination should occur between March and May each year.

More information: [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/flu-influenza](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/flu-influenza)

## Measles

Measles is a highly contagious viral illness that causes a skin rash and fever. It is estimated that a person with measles will infect about 9 in every 10 people they have contact with who do not already have immunity. Measles is most commonly spread when someone swallows or inhales the cough or sneeze droplets from an infected person, but can also occur by coming into contact with contaminated surfaces. Serious and sometimes fatal complications including pneumonia and encephalitis (brain inflammation). Worldwide, measles is the fifth highest cause of illness and death in children.

Immunisation is the best protection against measles. A person who receives the recommended two doses of a measles vaccine has 99 per cent immunity against infection.

More information: [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/measles](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/measles)

## Mumps

Mumps is a viral illness that causes fever and swollen salivary glands. Serious and potentially lethal complications include inflammation of the brain or heart muscle. It is spread from person to person through cough or sneeze droplets and is as contagious as influenza. One in three infected people do not display any symptoms but are still highly contagious.

Immunisation is the best way to prevent mumps and its associated potential complications. It is typically delivered through a combined measles, mumps and rubella vaccine. There is currently no specific medical treatment available to people who have contracted mumps.

More information: [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/mumps](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/mumps)

## Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

Pertussis is a serious, contagious, respiratory infection that begins like a cold and then develops a characteristic cough. The 'whoop' (which isn't always obvious) is due to a deep breath at the end of a bout of coughing, which commonly induces vomiting. It is spread by an infected person coughing or sneezing. Whooping cough is particularly dangerous for babies less than six months of age, as they are affected more seriously by the disease and are more likely to develop complications. One in every 200 babies who contract whooping cough will die.

Immunisation is the best way to reduce the risk of whooping cough. It is usually delivered in a vaccine combined with diphtheria and tetanus (for adolescents and adults). The Victorian immunisation for healthcare workers guidelines state that a booster dose of dTpa vaccine is recommended if 10 years have elapsed since a previous dose, and this is a requirement of most placement providers.

More information: [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/whooping-cough](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/whooping-cough)

## Poliomyelitis

Poliomyelitis (polio) is a serious disease that is spread through contact with food, water or hands that are contaminated with the faeces or throat secretions of an infected person. Symptoms vary from mild, flu-like symptoms to life-threatening paralysis. Two to five per cent of people who develop paralytic polio will die, and half of those who survive will have permanent paralysis.

Immunisation is the best protection against polio. The three-dose polio vaccine is typically administered to children in combination with vaccines for other infectious diseases.

More information: [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/polio-and-post-polio-syndrome](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/polio-and-post-polio-syndrome)

## Rubella (German Measles)

Rubella is a viral illness that causes a skin rash and joint pain. It is a mild infection for most people and often shows no symptoms, but it can have serious consequences for an unborn baby. If a pregnant woman contracts rubella, her baby is at risk of severe and permanent birth defects or death.

Immunisation is the best way to prevent rubella. Previous infection usually provides lifelong immunity for most people, and a vaccine is available combined with measles and mumps protection.

More information: [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/rubella](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/rubella)

## Tetanus (Lockjaw)

Tetanus is a serious bacterial disease that causes muscle spasms and breathing problems. It is a life-threatening disease and sometimes, death will occur even with prompt medical attention. Around 1 in 10 people infected with the bacterium that causes tetanus will die. The bacteria lives in soil, dust and manure, and infection usually occurs when the bacteria enters the body through a break in the skin. Tetanus is not transmitted from person to person.

The best way to reduce the risk of tetanus is by immunisation. It is delivered in a combined vaccine with diphtheria and pertussis protection (for adults and adolescents), which should be delivered every 10 years.

More information: [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/tetanus](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/tetanus)

## Tuberculosis

Tuberculosis (TB) is an infectious disease that targets the lungs and can cause serious illness or death. It is spread through the air by coughing, sneezing, shouting, speaking or singing. Some infected people will not experience any symptoms because their bodies are able to fight off the infection. This is called latent or inactive TB, and is not infectious. Other people may be unable to fight off the bacteria and are said to have active TB. These people will experience symptoms and are infectious. People with latent TB can be prescribed medication to reduce the risk of developing active TB.

Students should undergo screening for tuberculosis by way of a two-step tuberculin (Mantoux) skin test or a QuantiFERON Gold blood test annually.

More information: [www.healthdirect.gov.au/tuberculosis](http://www.healthdirect.gov.au/tuberculosis)

## Varicella

Varicella is a highly contagious virus that can cause chickenpox. The main symptom is a blistering skin rash. The virus is spread through coughing and sneezing or from touching the fluid from the blisters on the skin of an infected person. An infected person is contagious for up to five days before the onset of the rash and remains infectious until the blisters form scabs.

People who get chickenpox are at risk of developing shingles later in life, since the virus lies dormant in the body. Shingles is a severe skin rash characterised by pain and blistering which usually occurs on one side of the face or body. Tender, painful skin, tiredness, headache and photophobia may occur 2 to 3 days before the skin turns red and breaks out in tiny fluid-filled blisters.

Immunisation against varicella is available as a vaccine. This is recommended for anyone who has not previously contracted chickenpox.

More information: [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/chickenpox](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/chickenpox)