Health information for students
Infectious diseases

This leaflet provides information and advice about staying healthy while at university or college. It covers infectious diseases that sometimes affect institutions where a lot of people gather. The information has been provided by your local Health Protection Unit (HPU) and includes details of where to get further help and information.

Register with a local GP

It is very important to register with a GP. That way you can receive emergency and NHS care quickly and easily if you need it. If you have recently arrived in the UK, register with a GP as soon as possible. If you already have a GP in the UK, but they are not located where you live most of the time, you should register with a local surgery. You can register with any local GP. Visit the NHS Choices website www.nhs.uk or call NHS Direct on 0845 4647 to find GPs close to your home or college.

Tuberculosis (TB)

TB is a disease caused by bacteria. It usually affects the lungs but can affect any part of the body. TB of the lungs slowly destroys lung tissue. TB is only infectious if it affects the lungs or throat.

Symptoms of TB
• A cough that lasts for more than three weeks
• Loss of weight for no obvious reason
• Fever
• Heavy night sweats
• Fatigue/a general and unusual sense of tiredness and being unwell
• Loss of appetite

Contact your GP if you are experiencing any of these symptoms and you are concerned you may have TB.

Treatment for TB - TB is curable with antibiotics, which are usually taken for at least six months. Those with the infectious form of TB can become non-infectious soon after beginning treatment (usually two weeks) if the treatment is taken as instructed by their doctor.

Screening on arrival - If you have recently arrived in the UK, you may have had a chest X-ray on arrival (or prior to leaving your home country). Even if you were given the all clear, you still need to contact a doctor as soon as possible if you experience any of the signs and symptoms of TB. Being diagnosed with TB or any other infectious disease will not affect your visa.

BCG vaccine - The BCG vaccine provides some protection against TB but does not give full immunity. You can still get TB even if you have had the vaccine before so contact your GP if you have any TB symptoms.

Further information:
www.hpa.org.uk | www.tbalert.org
Important vaccines

Outbreaks of vaccine-preventable infections, such as measles and mumps, have occurred at universities in recent years. Infections can spread quickly among students because of close mixing at college and socially.

Some important vaccines and the infections they protect against are detailed below. You are likely to have had most of these free vaccines when you were younger. If you are unsure whether you have had these vaccines, consult your GP as soon as possible.

Measles, mumps and rubella vaccine (MMR)

The MMR vaccine protects against measles, mumps and rubella. It is normally given to children at 12–15 months and again at 3–5 years of age.

• TWO DOSES of MMR are required to give best protection against all three illnesses.
• There is no age limit for this vaccine. You can have it as an adult if you haven’t had it before.
• Contact your GP if you are unsure whether you have had two doses of MMR.

Measles, mumps and rubella are highly infectious viral illnesses which are spread by direct contact with saliva, or droplets from the saliva, of an infected person

Measles can cause fever, coughing and distinctive red-brown spots on the skin. Complications include pneumonia and brain inflammation. Measles can be very serious for pregnant women. In 2010, 22% of the confirmed measles cases in England and Wales were in young people aged 15 - 24 years.

Mumps can cause headache, fever and swelling of the salivary glands. Complications include swelling of the ovaries or testes. Over half (57%) of the confirmed mumps cases in England and Wales in 2010 were in young people aged 15 - 24 years.

Rubella (German measles) can cause a rash and swollen glands around the ears and the back of your head. Rubella is usually a mild infectious disease, although it can have serious consequences for pregnant women.

Pregnant women who have come into contact with someone who has rubella or measles should contact their GP or midwife for further advice.

How to prevent spreading these infections

If you suspect you have any of these infections, contact your GP. If you have measles or rubella, it is important to avoid contact with people at college and socially. It is particularly important to avoid contact with pregnant women for four days if you have measles and six days if you have rubella from when the rash starts. If you have mumps, avoid contact with other people for five days after the first day your glands began to swell.

Further information:
NHS Choices - www.nhs.uk/conditions/mmr
**HPV vaccine**

The Human Papilloma Virus can lead to cervical cancer in women (cancer of the cervix). This is why the HPV vaccine is also known as the cervical cancer jab.

HPV is spread through skin-to-skin contact. Genital HPV infections are common and spread through sexual contact. Viruses that cause genital HPV infections may be present on your genitals and the surrounding area, including around your anus. Infection with some high-risk types of HPV can cause abnormal tissue growth and other cell changes that can lead to cervical cancer.

In the UK all 12-13 year old girls are offered HPV vaccination through the national HPV immunisation programme. This vaccine will protect girls against infection with HPV 16 and 18 (associated with 70% of cervical cancers). Girls aged up to 18 years can have the vaccine as part of the catch-up campaign. Girls should contact their GP if they have not had the HPV vaccine.

**Further information:** www.nhs.uk/conditions/hpv-vaccination

**Travel vaccines**

Before booking a trip abroad, it’s important to be aware of the infectious diseases associated with the area you are travelling to.

Common travel related infections include traveller’s diarrhoea, hepatitis A, meningitis and malaria.

Some of these infections can be prevented with a vaccine or by taking medication. Good food hygiene can also help reduce the risk of picking up infections. Basic food hygiene can help reduce the risk of picking up other infections. The best way to ensure you are fully prepared for your trip is to visit your GP at least six weeks before you travel. Ideally, you should consider this before booking your trip, particularly if you have a medical condition.

**Further information:**
National Travel Health Network and Centre (NaTHNaC) - www.nathnac.org
NHS Choices - www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Travel-immunisation
Meningitis

Meningitis is an illness where the lining of the brain and spinal cord become inflamed. It can be caused by viruses, bacteria and other agents.

- **Viral meningitis** is rarely serious but you may feel unwell and possibly need to be monitored in hospital.
- **Bacterial meningitis** is less common than viral meningitis. It is a serious illness and needs urgent treatment with antibiotics.
- **Meningococcal bacteria** are the most common cause of meningitis.

**Meningococcal meningitis and septicaemia**

Meningococcal bacteria are very common and cause infection in the lining of the brain (meningitis) and the blood (septicaemia). At any one time, 10–20% of us carry these bacteria in our nose and throat without knowing it. We can pick up these bacteria by close, prolonged contact with someone carrying them. This could be through living in the same house or mouth-to-mouth kissing.

The contact has to be close because the bacteria cannot live for more than a few seconds outside the body. The risk of transmission is generally low but increases among people living in the same house or residential hall.

- Not all symptoms may be present or show at once.
- Some of the symptoms are similar to a hangover or flu. If you think you or one of your friends has meningitis it is important to contact a doctor as soon as possible.
- If someone is diagnosed with meningococcal infection then the Health Protection Unit will identify their close contacts and give advice as required.

**MenC vaccine**

The MenC vaccine protects against one type of meningococcal bacteria: group C. Everyone attending college or university should have the MenC vaccine if they have not had it before. There is no age limit for this vaccine.

**If you have not had the MenC vaccine, contact your GP as soon as possible.**

The vaccine is free.

The MenC vaccine does not protect against meningitis caused by other groups of meningococcal bacteria (A, B, W or Y). Even if you and your friends have had the MenC vaccine, it is still very important to be aware of the symptoms. If you suspect that you or your friends have meningitis or septicaemia, seek medical help immediately.

**Further information:**

NHS Direct - 0845 4647 (24 hours a day)
Pictures courtesy of the Meningitis Trust - 0800 028 18 28 www.meningitis-trust.org
Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

Young people under 25 years of age experience the highest rates of STIs particularly in London where STIs are more common. The chances of picking up an STI may be greater than you think. As well as unpleasant symptoms, STIs have consequences. Even those without obvious symptoms may cause infertility and other long-term damage to health.

Chlamydia

Chlamydia is the most common STI among young people (genital warts is the second). It often has no symptoms and, if left untreated, can lead to infertility for both men and women.

You can only be sure you don’t have chlamydia by taking a test. Males and females under the age of 25 can have a free test for chlamydia on the NHS at their GP surgery, a community contraceptive clinic (family planning clinic), a genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinic and some pharmacies.

If the test is positive, chlamydia is easily treated with antibiotics, which are free from the places listed above. To find out more, call the National Chlamydia Screening Programme helpline on 0800 567 123, or go to www.chlamydiascreening.nhs.uk

Other common STIs

Other common STIs among students include genital warts, genital herpes and gonorrhoea. Out of everyone who attended GUM clinics in 2010, 47% of gonorrhoea, 54% of genital warts and 41% of genital herpes diagnoses were in 15–25 year olds. HIV infection is less common, but is a risk for young people. In 2009, under 25s accounted for 10% of all new HIV cases in the UK. If you think you may have an STI then you can get yourself tested at your nearest sexual health clinic.

Safe sex

Whether you’re single or in a new relationship, the message is clear: if you’re sexually active, the best way to reduce your chances of getting an STI is to always use a condom. Free condoms and sexual health advice are available locally.

Enter your postcode on the following website to find your nearest service:

www.nhs.uk/LiveWell/SexualHealth

How safe is your sex life?

Find out whether your sex life is safe by taking this self assessment:

www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/Safesextool.aspx

Further information:

www.sho-me.nhs.uk
Flu

Seasonal influenza (flu) is a highly infectious respiratory illness caused by various flu viruses that can change each year. The illness spreads rapidly via droplets in the coughs and sneezes of infected people.

Symptoms frequently include headache, fever, cough, sore throat, aching muscles and joints. Some people suffer serious infection. If you suspect you have flu and feel very unwell, call your GP practice to talk to a doctor. They will advise on treatment and how to best manage your symptoms. It is important that you stay away from college and friends until you are symptom free.

The seasonal flu vaccine is offered free of charge each year to the following risk groups:

- People who have asthma and take inhaled steroids.
- People with a serious long-term condition for example kidney, heart or lung disease.
- People aged 65 years and over.
- Pregnant women.

If you are unsure whether it is important for you to have the flu vaccine due to a medical condition please consult your GP.

Good hygiene measures

Good hygiene measures can help to reduce the spread of viruses including flu. Remember to:

Catch it – always carry a tissue to catch your coughs and sneezes.
Bin it – dispose of your tissue as soon as possible.
Kill it – germs can transfer to every surface you touch. Wash your hands as soon as you can.

Diarrhoea and vomiting

There are many causes of diarrhoea and vomiting including viruses like norovirus and food poisoning bacteria like salmonella and campylobacter. If you have diarrhoea or vomiting, stay away from college/university/work until you have not had any symptoms for 48 hours. If your symptoms continue, or get worse, then you should contact your GP.

- Do not handle food for others. If you work part time in the food industry then it is important to stay away from work if you have diarrhoea and/or vomiting.
- Wash your hands properly with soap and water and dry your hands. This will help to prevent the illness being passed to others.

The information included in this leaflet has been sourced from the HPA, Meningitis Trust and NHS websites. Further information on the topics included can be found on www.hpa.org.uk www.nhs.uk/LiveWell/Studenthealth

Date produced: September 2011 | Produced by: HPA London