

Staying healthy while studying

1. Immunisation information for tertiary students in New Zealand

Staying healthy by protecting yourself from preventable illness while you are studying is important. Serious illness can significantly affect your ability to complete your programme.

Vaccine preventable diseases are generally well controlled in New Zealand due to a very effective National Immunisation Programme. However, students enrolled in tertiary studies and students who live in student accommodation are at increased risk from some vaccine preventable illnesses, including influenza and meningococcal meningitis. Make sure you are up-to-date with all recommended vaccines. If you are unsure whether you have had all your immunisations, talk to your healthcare provider before starting your course or visit your student health service on campus.

For some courses, you will be required to provide proof of immunisation or serological (blood test) evidence of immunity before you can attend a course or complete a clinical placement – refer to section 2 on the next page.

For New Zealand residents and those students who are eligible for funded health care services, some vaccines will be free from your health care provider. For some vaccines e.g. meningococcal vaccines, and for international students, there will usually be costs involved.

Recommended immunisations

When you are over 18 years of age, vaccines you are recommended to have received are:

Tetanus/diphtheria

Three documented doses of tetanus/diphtheria (Td) containing vaccines.

Pertussis (whooping cough)

One documented dose of pertussis containing vaccine every 10 years for those in contact with babies/young children.

Polio

Three documented doses of polio containing vaccine (OPV or IPV).

Measles, mumps and rubella

Two documented doses of measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine for all unimmunised and partially immunised people born from 1 January 1969. The first dose must be received when aged 12 months or older.

Human papillomavirus

Two or three documented doses of human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine. The number of doses required varies depending on the age when vaccinated.

Hepatitis B

Two or three documented doses of hepatitis B vaccine for students who are at increased risk of acquiring hepatitis B infection. The number of doses required varies depending on the age when vaccinated.

Other highly recommended immunisations

Influenza

Annual influenza (flu) immunisation provides the best protection. Influenza is different from and more severe than the common cold. Antibiotics do not work for influenza or common colds.

Note: Those who have certain medical conditions, are 65 years of age or older or are pregnant, and who are eligible to receive publicly funded health services, are eligible for free influenza vaccine. Visit the Fight Flu website www.fightflu.co.nz for more information.

Meningococcal disease

Meningitis and septicaemia (blood poisoning) are rare but life-threatening diseases caused by several groups of meningococcal bacteria. Tertiary students have an increased risk of meningococcal disease, especially if they are living in student accommodation and have close contact with other students. Vaccines against meningococcal groups A, C, Y and W and against meningococcal group B are available.

Chickenpox (varicella)

Complications of chickenpox can be severe especially in adolescents and adults. Students who have no history of chickenpox disease, e.g. those born and raised in tropical countries, or chickenpox immunisation are recommended to receive two doses of varicella vaccine at least 4 weeks apart.

Catch-up immunisation

Catch-up immunisations can be arranged at your healthcare provider or student health service for students who have missed some immunisations or have not previously been immunised. Some vaccines may be provided free (funded).

Caring for yourself and others

Lifestyle habits that can help you stay well

- » Wash your hands regularly with soap or use hand sanitiser, especially before eating and after using bathrooms/toilets.
- » Eat healthy food, including fruit and vegetables.
- » Limit alcohol intake and do not smoke.
- » Get plenty of sleep and exercise.
- » Manage stress and seek support when needed.

If you are unwell

- » Make sure other people e.g. family member, flatmate, friend or hostel staff are aware you are unwell and can assist you if needed, and see your healthcare provider or student health service on campus promptly when required.
- » Stay at home and rest in a separate, well ventilated room away from other people
- » Wash your hands with soap or use hand sanitiser, especially before using shared areas such as kitchens and bathrooms.
- » Cough and sneeze into disposable tissues or the inside of your elbow.

Staying healthy while studying

2. Students enrolled in clinical education programmes

Some study programmes and occupations increase the risk of contracting and spreading diseases that can be prevented by immunisation.

Students who will be in direct contact with patients/clients of healthcare services, work with small children or animals, or handle material that could spread infection are at risk for exposure to serious, potentially deadly diseases and may need additional immunisations for protection.

Proof of immunity

Students enrolled in study programmes where there is an increased risk of contracting and spreading diseases may be required to provide proof of immunity against vaccine-preventable diseases. Requirements for determining immune status (documented immunity/protection) differs for each disease/vaccine - details below.

Note: Students who do not have evidence of immunity and/or do not complete the required immunisations and/or screening may not be allowed to attend their clinical placements and need to discuss their situation with their tertiary institution promptly.

Tetanus/diphtheria

Three documented doses of tetanus/diphtheria (Td) containing vaccine administered with at least one month between each of the doses.

Pertussis (whooping cough)

One documented dose of pertussis containing vaccine every 10 years.

Polio

Three documented doses of polio vaccine (OPV or IPV) administered with at least one month between each of the doses.

Measles, mumps and rubella

Two documented doses of measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine administered when aged 12 months or older with at least one month between the doses, or serological proof (i.e. by blood test) of immunity for individuals born 1 January 1969 or later.

Note (a): Individuals born before 1969 are considered immune to measles, mumps and rubella. They do not require any other evidence of immunity against these diseases.

Note (b): New Zealand has experienced an outbreak of mumps over the past 2 years amongst students who have not been immunised against mumps, e.g. no immunisations received or received measles only or measles/rubella (MR) only vaccines in the past. These students can receive two doses of MMR vaccine for free (funded).

Chickenpox (varicella)

A documented age appropriate course of varicella vaccine, or documented evidence of chickenpox infection or herpes zoster (shingles), or serological proof (i.e. by blood test) of immunity.

Hepatitis A

Two documented doses of hepatitis A vaccine administered with at least 6 months between doses. Serological proof (i.e. by blood test) is not routinely recommended after immunisation.

Hepatitis B

Three documented doses* of hepatitis B vaccine administered from 4 weeks of age with at least one month between each of the doses, and serological proof of immunity i.e. by blood test.

*Note regarding adolescent hepatitis B immunisation: Two documented doses of adult strength hepatitis B vaccine administered at least 4 months apart to an adolescent aged 11–15 years provides a complete vaccine course.

Influenza

One documented influenza vaccine dose annually.

Meningococcal disease

Documented age appropriate doses of meningococcal vaccine with appropriate booster doses.

Tuberculosis

Screening for tuberculosis (TB) infection is also required for some courses. BCG vaccination is not recommended for adults.

More information and resources:

Your healthcare provider or student health service

Immunisation advice and all recommended vaccines can be accessed through your healthcare provider or student health service on campus.

The Immunisation Advisory Centre (IMAC)

Visit the IMAC website www.immune.org.nz for independent, factual information about vaccine-preventable diseases and immunisation.

Immunisation Handbook 2017 2nd Edition

The Handbook is available from the Ministry of Health website www.health.govt.nz/publication/immunisation-handbook-2017 provides clinical guidelines for health professionals on the safest and most effective use of vaccines in their practice.

Healthline

0800 611 116

24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Anyone can call Healthline for
free health or illness related
advice or information.