



Health Information for Students

Infectious diseases

This leaflet provides information about how to stay healthy while at university or college. It covers communicable diseases including vaccine preventable, and sexually transmitted diseases, outlining actions you can take to reduce your risk and where to seek help and advice if you are unwell.

Register with a local GP

It is important to register with a GP. That way you can access and receive emergency and NHS care quickly and easily should 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 now live, you should register with a local surgery.

To register with a local GP [click here](#) or visit the NHS Choices website <http://www.nhs.uk/pages/home.aspx>

Important vaccines

Outbreaks of vaccine-preventable infections do occur in universities and college settings. Infections can spread quickly due to close living arrangements and being part of new larger social circles.

Some important vaccine preventable diseases are detailed below. You are likely to have received most of these vaccines as a child but if you are unsure if you have been vaccinated consult your GP as soon as possible,

You should be aware of these infections and their signs and symptoms. If you are unwell, it is important that you seek medical advice as soon as possible. For some infections, you should not attend college or other social gatherings until the infection has cleared and you are no longer infectious. Your GP will advise you.

Measles, mumps and rubella

Measles, mumps and rubella are highly infectious viral illnesses, spread by 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 and those with chronic illnesses or weakened immune systems.

Mumps can cause headache, fever and swelling of the salivary glands. Complications include swelling of the ovaries or testes. The majority of cases of mumps are young people aged 15 - 24 years.

Rubella (*German measles*) can cause 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 the unborn children of pregnant women.

Protect yourself against Measles, Mumps and Rubella - Two doses of the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine provide excellent protection against each disease. If you are unsure whether you have had two doses of MMR vaccine, book an appointment with your GP or Practice Nurse.

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

If you suspect you have any of these infections

Contact your GP surgery
Avoid contact with people socially and at university
Avoid contact with pregnant women

Further information: NHS Choices www.nhs.uk/conditions/mmr

Meningitis (and invasive meningococcal disease)

Meningitis is an illness causing inflammation of the linings of the brain and spinal cord. Viruses, bacteria and other agents can cause meningitis. This is a serious illness and needs urgent medical treatment.

The most common cause of meningitis and invasive meningococcal disease is the meningococcus bacteria. Around 20-30% of the population carry the meningococcus bacteria in their nose and throat without knowing it or causing them any harm. We can pick up the meningococcus bacteria if we have very close prolonged contact (e.g. living in the same house or mouth kissing) with someone carrying the bacteria.

Protect yourself against Meningitis

Vaccinations offer some protection against types of meningitis and invasive meningococcal disease. The meningitis ACWY vaccine is offered to teenagers and "fresher" students attending higher education for the first time, if you are unsure if you have received this vaccination, contact the GP surgery to arrange an appointment.

Symptoms of meningitis

Symptoms develop suddenly and can include:

- a high temperature (fever) of 38C or above
- vomiting
- a headache
- a stiff neck
- a dislike of bright lights
- drowsiness or unresponsiveness
- seizures (fits)
- a blotchy rash that doesn't fade when a glass is rolled over it (this doesn't always develop)



Not all of these symptoms may be present, but if you suspect you or one of your friends has meningitis then get medical help immediately.

Further information: <https://www.meningitisnow.org/>

Tuberculosis (TB)

TB is a disease caused by the mycobacterium tuberculosis bacteria. It usually affects the lungs but can also affect other parts of the body. TB is only infectious to other people if it affects the lungs or throat.

Symptoms of TB

Contact your GP if you are experiencing any of these symptoms

- a cough lasting 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



If you have recently arrived in the UK, you may have received TB screening prior to your travel. Even if you were given the all clear, you must contact a doctor as soon as possible if you experience these signs and symptoms. Being diagnosed with TB or any other infectious disease will not affect your visa, and you will not be asked about your immigration status at the TB clinic.

Early diagnosis and treatment is very important to help ensure you recover quickly. TB is curable with antibiotics; these are usually taken for at least six months.

Further information: www.tbalert.org

Sexual Health

Many people do not get symptoms with a sexually transmitted infection (STI). If you think you may have an STI, go to your GP or local sexual health or GUM (genitourinary medicine) clinic. Most STIs can be successfully treated, so it's important to get any symptoms checked as soon as possible.

Chlamydia is the most common STI among young people. Testing comprises a simple urine test, and, if positive, chlamydia is easily treated with antibiotics. www.chlamydia-screening.nhs.uk

Other common STIs include:

- Gonorrhoea.
- Genital Herpes.
- Human Papillomavirus (HPV)
- Syphilis.
- Trichomoniasis.

HIV and Hepatitis infections are less common, but remain a risk.

Safe sex

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 Generally, if you are sexually active, the best way to reduce your risk of getting an STI is to **always use a condom**.

If you think you have had unsafe sex or could have an STI, it is important to get yourself tested and vaccinated against the following infections at your nearest sexual health clinic. Available vaccinations include:

- Hepatitis A
- Hepatitis B
- Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)

Further information: Free condoms and sexual health advice are available; enter your postcode on the following website to find your nearest service: www.nhs.uk/%20LiveWell/SexualHealth

Seasonal influenza (flu)

Flu is a highly infectious respiratory illness caused by various flu viruses that change slightly each year. The illness spreads rapidly from person to person via droplets.

Symptoms include headache, aching muscles and joints, fever, cough, and sore throat.

If you suspect you have flu and feel unwell, call your GP practice. They will advise on treatment and how to manage your symptoms. It is important that you stay away from college and avoid mixing with friends until you have been symptom free for 72 hours.

The seasonal flu vaccine is free of charge each year to risk groups; they include:

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

If you are in one of these risk groups, it is important for you to have the flu vaccine - consult your GP.

Simple hygiene measures reduce the spread of viruses, including flu.

Wash your hands properly with soap and water and dry your hands thoroughly. This will help to prevent the illness transmitting to others.

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

Diarrhoea and vomiting

There are many viral and bacterial causes of diarrhoea and vomiting (D&V) including norovirus, salmonella and campylobacter. If you have D&V, contact your GP and stay away from college/university/work for at least 48 hours after all symptoms have stopped. If you have D&V do not handle or cook food for others.



If your work or college course involves handling food and your symptoms continue for longer than 24 hours or get worse, you should contact your GP and submit stool samples to identify the cause.

Some infections require a food handler to be excluded from work or food course until stool samples have been taken, tested, and shown to be free from harmful bacteria.

Travel Health

Before booking a trip abroad, it is important to be aware of the communicable diseases associated with your destination and the actions you can take to reduce the risk of infection. Some diseases are preventable through vaccination, medication (e.g. malaria prophylaxis) and basic precautions such as hand washing, food hygiene and drinking safe water (bottled or treated).



Always try to visit your GP or travel clinic at least six weeks before you travel so that your vaccinations have time to work before you go.

Further information: National Travel Health Network and Centre (NaTHNaC) - <https://nathnac.net/>
NHS Choices - www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Travel-immunisation

Information on how to contact Public Health England (PHE) local health protection teams:
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/contacts-phe-health-protection-teams>

General information on student health

Advice on student health issues, including registering with a GP, vaccinations and the Disabled Students' Allowance can be accessed at www.nhs.uk/LiveWell/Studenthealth