

OHS Infectious Diseases Policy

Section 1 - Overview

(1) The University of New England (UNE) has a duty of care towards students and staff and others to provide a safe and secure teaching environment. UNE recognises that, in an era of international globalisation, individuals employed or studying at the University may come into contact with an infectious disease and that policies and procedures are required to comply with legislative requirements to prevent or minimise the risk of transmission of infectious or blood-borne diseases.

(2) In NSW, the control of communicable diseases is a core function of government which is achieved through collaboration with community based agencies. In NSW reporting of notifiable diseases, communicable disease prevention and pandemic management is co-ordinated through the NSW Department of Health Centre for Health Protection and the public health network of local Public Health Units. The Commonwealth Government has developed national communication guidelines and pandemic action plans.

Section 2 - Scope

(3) The scope of this policy embraces all work related activities undertaken on campus and in fieldwork locations. It also includes students and staff who are required to participate in workplace learning placements and clinical rotations in health care settings involved with the provision of patient care and services. Although it does include requirements for onsite residential students, it does not include sport and other recreational related activities.

Section 3 - Policy

(4) UNE is committed to ensuring the safety of students and staff by actively promoting infection control, immunisations and other measures to prevent or minimise the risk of transmission of infectious and blood borne diseases.

(5) UNE will comply with Commonwealth & State legislation.

(6) UNE will be guided by the recommendations of the NSW Department of Health on all matters related to infectious diseases and pandemics.

(7) UNE prohibits coercion of disclosure of status and discrimination against students and staff with notifiable diseases.

(8) Staff with access to information relating to notifications of infectious diseases are to protect the confidentiality of the information.

(9) Students and staff are required to understand their responsibilities to protect themselves as individuals and their responsibilities to protect others from transmission of blood borne and other infectious diseases.

(10) Students and staff with infectious diseases must use a risk management approach in deciding whether to exclude themselves from exposure-prone activities, venues and procedures.

(11) Whenever possible the OHS Unit will co ordinate contact between UNE and the Communicable Diseases branch of NSW Department of Health.

(12) Academic and administration units which have high risk exposures may develop their own policies and procedures as long as they are compatible with this policy.

Prevention of Transmission

(13) Staff and students must follow safe work procedures and treat all blood products and body substances as potentially infectious.

(14) It is an expectation that Universal precautions, including hand washing protocols and cough etiquette, will be adopted by all staff, students and UNE visitors.

(15) Hand washing, cough etiquette and other relevant infection control posters will be on display in all ablution facilities.

(16) Staff and students with identified airborne communicable diseases (excluding the common cold) must obtain a clearance from their consulting Specialist/General Practitioner before entering enclosed spaces where a number of people are gathered.

(17) Lecturers, supervisors, exam invigilators and OHS representatives may request staff or students to use personal protective equipment if no other options are available.

(18) Special examinations provisions are available for students who need to sit an exam when infectious.

(19) If special examination provisions are made the procedures recommended by the consulting Specialist/General Practitioner will normally be followed, however where when there is a conflict with UNE executives perception of their duty of care and NSW health policies the University may err on the side of caution and make decisions on a case by case basis.

(20) The wearing of masks, although low on the Hierarchy of Control, is an acceptable form of personal protection and transmission prevention.

(21) The concerns of staff and students with lowered immune systems will be a priority in any deliberations, but the rights of the student who may be infectious or just a carrier also need to be considered when making decisions.

Section 4 - Procedures

Temporary disability

(22) Staff with infectious diseases or caring for family members with infectious diseases must contact Human Resource services if their leave allocation is exhausted.

(23) Students with communicable diseases need to apply for a special exam. Depending on the nature of the disease this may need to be an alternative assessment or a special examination arranged and supervised by the relevant school.

(24) If required the OHS Unit will co ordinate arrangements for exams or return to work.

Medical Centre

(25) Staff and students are advised to contact their General Practitioner if they are unwell.

(26) The UNE Medical Centre will provide medical appointments and vaccinations on request.

(27) Phone calls to the UNE Medical Centre will be triaged to a Doctor or nurse and advice on how and where to access appropriate medical care will be given.

Vaccinations

(28) Some staff and students are required to be vaccinated as an inherent requirement of their position or course. These requirements will be determined by legislation, school or course requirements, directorate specific procedures or the policies of external organisations. Potential exposures may include Tetanus; Diphtheria; Polio; Measles; Mumps; Rubella; Hepatitis B.

(29) A risk assessment process must be used to assess whether staff and students who travel overseas require other vaccinations such as Combined Hep A & B; Yellow Fever; Rabies vaccine; Japanese B Encephalitis.

(30) Researchers working with animals need to conduct a risk assessment to identify if vaccination for animal specific diseases such as Q fever is required.

(31) NSW Health Occupational Assessment, Screening and Vaccination policy requires that all students and staff working in Dept of Health premises are vaccinated prior to commencing work.

(32) The University may decide to provide influenza vaccinations for staff. Participation in such activities is voluntary.

Zoonosis

(33) Students and Staff working with animals, particularly but not restricted to mammals, must take precautions to prevent the transmission of zoonotic parasites and pathogens between animals and humans.

(34) High standards of hygiene and infection control are required both before and after contact. Vaccination may be required.

(35) Women when pregnant may be required to cease working with animals if a risk assessment identifies that early delivery, infection or death of the newborn baby may be an outcome.

Laboratory activities

(36) All laboratories handling human biological specimens will have a Person in Control and written procedures for safe handling of biological specimens.

(37) Students and staff will be required to comply with these guidelines.

(38) All laboratory workers must be trained in the handling and disposal of sharps.

Service staff

(39) All staff must receive information about infection control as a component of their induction training.

(40) Maintenance workers and trade staff must be trained in the handling and disposal of contaminated waste.

NSW Health placements

(41) Students and staff involved in work placements in NSW Health settings must comply with NSW Health immunisation requirements.

(42) Students and staff must have access to OHS management systems and serological and other testing of immunity

within placement agencies.

(43) Students have the choice to opt out of the immunisation program on medical or conscientious grounds with the written permission of their Head of School. Opting out would be subject to consideration as to whether the student is likely to undertake exposure-prone procedures.

(44) Students and staff who do not undertake the immunisation program for whatever reason must be referred by their General Practitioner or immunisation provider to an appropriate specialist for further advice on protecting themselves and others from infectious diseases.

(45) Students are responsible for the cost of required testing and immunisations.

International

(46) Staff and students undertaking a period of work or study overseas, particularly in developing countries, must be advised of health risks at the time of inquiry and take appropriate precautions.

(47) Travel permission may be denied if students or staff do not comply with recommended vaccination requirements for malaria, Hepatitis A, polio, typhoid, meningococcal disease, yellow fever.

(48) International students and visiting academics are required to meet the same screening and immunisation standards of domestic students and staff.

Residences

(49) Standard infection control principles will be practised in all Residences.

(50) All Residence Business Continuity Plans must include procedures for infectious diseases and pandemics.

(51) Residence management may require students to relocate during outbreaks of communicable diseases if isolation procedures need to be introduced.

(52) Cleaning, kitchen, and student admission protocols will be amended if enhanced protocols are required to prevent or mitigate communicable disease outbreaks.

(53) It is highly recommended that students and staff seek medical advice if they are unwell or have potentially communicable rashes, skin complaints and sexually transmitted infections.

(54) Students in residence are advised to obtain annual influenza vaccinations and consider booster vaccines if they suspect their immunity may be low.

(55) Students with symptoms of a range of childhood diseases may continue to be accommodated in the residences especially if the infectious period is passed.

Pandemic

(56) The compilation of fact sheets and implementation of communication protocols will be a priority if the potential for a pandemic is identified.

(57) Pandemic Action Plans will be implemented as required.

(58) A consultative approach will be used to develop pandemic management guidelines, if required.

Section 5 - Definitions

(59) Communicable disease - An infectious disease that can be communicated from one person to another either directly or by contact or indirectly by fomites or vectors

(60) Infectious disease - Any disease caused by invasion by a pathogen which subsequently grows or multiplies in the body

(61) Notifiable diseases are communicable diseases notifiable under the Public Health Act and Regulation 1991

(62) Specified Infectious Diseases - These are communicable diseases for which the NSW Department of Health requires evidence of protection prior to employment on a casual, temporary or casual basis; they include Diphtheria, Hepatitis B, measles, Mumps, Rubella, Pertussis, Tetanus, Tuberculosis, Varicella (chicken pox)

(63) Zoonosis - Any infectious disease that can be transmitted (in some cases by a vector) from non-human animals, both wild and domestic, to humans or from humans to non-human animals (the latter is sometimes called reverse zoonosis or anthroponosis).

Status and Details

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