Hepatitis B (HBV) is a liver infecting virus that causes acute and chronic forms of hepatitis. Chronic hepatitis B can lead to complications such as cirrhosis and liver cancer. Hepatitis B is transmitted through percutaneous and mucosal exposure to infective body fluids. Since HBV is stable on environmental surfaces for at least 7 days, indirect inoculation can occur via inanimate objects.

All healthcare workers, including students, who have contact with or potential exposure to blood or body fluids should be vaccinated against HBV or supply evidence that they are not susceptible to hepatitis B to their employer or university.

Hepatitis B is a vaccine preventable disease. A standard vaccination schedule for adults involves a course of 3 vaccinations, given at 0, 1 and 6 months. There is some flexibility regarding the interval between the doses, recommendations contained in the Australian Immunisation Handbook should be followed. In adolescents aged 11-15 years a vaccination schedule of two doses is frequently used.

Post vaccination serological testing is recommended for healthcare workers (including students), this should occur 4-8 weeks after completion of the primary course but should also be undertaken in healthcare workers who have previously been vaccinated but were not tested during the 4-8 week timeframe.

What do I do if I have completed the standard vaccination schedule but did not develop detectable serological evidence of immunity?

In some cases people who have completed their vaccination schedule may not have detectable serological evidence of immunity. In these situations the individual should see their healthcare provider as there are a number of factors that they need to be assessed for. This may include further serological testing, a booster vaccine dose or a repeat vaccination schedule.

I have completed my course of hepatitis B vaccinations and I need to start clinical placement before I am due to have my post vaccination antibody check, can I still attend placement?

Yes, you can. Queensland Health (QH) requires students and staff to show proof that they are vaccinated or that they are not susceptible to hepatitis B. Students who do not know their immune status or who have not had proven immunity post vaccination should also contact the Infection Control Practitioner (ICP) via the main number of the facility that they wish to attend to discuss placement options.

Are there any restrictions to areas I can attend clinical placement if I do not have proven immunity?

This is a decision that is made locally by health and hospital services (HHS). You should contact the Infection Control Practitioner who is responsible for the facility that you wish to attend.
attend as facilities may have restrictions on areas that non-immune staff can work. You can do this by calling the main hospital number and requesting the infection control unit.

**What is a non-responder?**

A non-responder is a person without HBV infection who has documented history of age appropriate primary course of hepatitis B vaccine, but with a current anti-HBs level < 10 mIU/mL. These people should be offered further doses of hepatitis B vaccine. Persistent non-responders should be informed that they should be considered not protected and should minimise exposure. They should also be informed about processes to follow if they are exposed to blood or body fluids.

**When are accelerated vaccination schedules used?**

Accelerated schedules should only be used for those persons with imminent risk of exposure. The Australian Immunisation handbook recommends that accelerated four dose schedules are only used in exceptional circumstances. Students who will not be vaccinated in time for placement with an ordinary schedule will need to seek the advice of a medical officer in regards to the accelerated schedule.

**What if I have hepatitis B and do not want to disclose my status?**

If you are hepatitis B antigen positive you do not have to disclose your hepatitis B status unless you perform exposure prone procedures (see: Guideline for the Management of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), Hepatitis B Virus, and Hepatitis C Virus Infected Healthcare Workers, Available from: [www.health.qld.gov.au/chrisp/ic_guidelines/index_guidelines.asp](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/chrisp/ic_guidelines/index_guidelines.asp)). In order to satisfy employment requirements of QH or to attend a student placement you are able to provide proof that you are not susceptible to hepatitis B. This could be provided in the form of a letter from a medical practitioner that states that you are not susceptible to hepatitis B. This statement could also be used by staff/students that have evidence of immunity after a course of hepatitis B vaccination.

**References**


**Contact Information**

Centre for Healthcare Related Infection Surveillance and Prevention & Tuberculosis Control
Department of Health
PO Box 2368
Fortitude Valley BC Qld 4006
CHRISP_TB@health.qld.gov.au