IMMUNISATION AND INFECTIOUS DISEASE POLICY

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Description of the Policy:
This policy identifies the measures that students in a Griffith Health degree program are required to take in order to minimise the risk of acquiring an infectious disease or transmitting such a disease to patients/clients in the course of their placement, and the responsibilities of Health and Human Service Schools.

Related University Policies, Procedures & Forms:
- Infection Control Policy
- Inability to Complete Required Components of Professional Qualification Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Reporting and Recording of Work-Caused Injury, Illness and Occurrences
- Immunisation and Health Record Form
- Exposure Prone Procedure Declaration Form
- Griffith University Incident Injury Report form

Related Griffith Health Guidelines:
- Guidelines on Hepatitis B Immunisation
- Guidelines on Tuberculosis Assessment and Screening

Links to external documents:
- Queensland Anti-Discrimination Act 1991
- Australian Immunisation Handbook
- Queensland Health Infection Control Guidelines, 2001
- Queensland Health Policy for Immunisation of Health Care Workers
- NSW Health Policy Directive: Occupational Assessment, Screening & Vaccination Against Specified Infectious Diseases, 2007
- NSW Health Policy Directive: HIV, Hepatitis B or Hepatitis C - Health Care Workers Infected, 2005
- NSW Health Infection Control Policy, 2007

1.0 Introduction

The Immunisation and Infectious Disease policy has been developed within a framework established by the University's Infection Control policy. In circumstances where there is a discrepancy between the provisions of this policy and the University's Infection Control Policy or any revisions thereto, the University's Policy will prevail.

The purpose of this policy is to protect the health of students and the patients/clients they encounter during a placement.

Students may interact with patients/clients at on campus clinics or at off campus facilities including hospitals in Queensland and New South Wales. Students who are placed in public facilities are required to comply with the policies of the relevant State health department.

This policy is structured to enable students to meet the requirements of both NSW Health and Queensland Health as students may be placed in a facility in either State during their studies.

State and Federal immunisation and blood borne virus requirements are subject to change. In addition, if placements are negotiated with students which fall outside New South Wales and Queensland jurisdictions there may be other requirements to be met. The University will
endeavour to notify students within a reasonable timeframe of changes or additions to placement requirements with which students must comply.

2.0 Scope

This policy applies to all students who are required to participate in a health or human service placement as part of the requirements of the Griffith Health degree in which they are enrolled.

3.0 Definitions

**Blood-Borne Viruses** are identified as Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), Hepatitis B Virus (HBV) and Hepatitis C Virus (HCV).

**Degree Program** means the tertiary degree program a student is enrolled in at the University.

**Exposure prone procedures** are a limited subset of invasive procedures characterised by “potential for contact between the skin (usually finger or thumb) of the health care worker and sharp surgical instruments, needles or sharp tissues (splinters/pieces of bone/tooth) in body cavities or in poorly visualized or confined body sites including the mouth.” *NSW Health (2007) Occupational Assessment, Screening & Vaccination Against specified Infectious Diseases*

**Facility** means a health or human service facility including a public health facility, public sector hospital or department, a private healthcare facility, community based health service or other facility or service run by a Health Service District or organisation or a Griffith University teaching clinic where a placement is undertaken.

**HBsAb or anti-HBs** is hepatitis B surface antibody. HBsAb ≥10 mIU/mL indicates immunity to hepatitis B.

**Health care workers** are persons (including students) involved in the delivery of health services in health facilities (particularly where those persons have regular contact with patients/clients or any contact with the blood or body substances from patients/clients).

**Invasive procedure** is “any procedure that pierces the skin or mucous membrane or enters a body cavity or organ. This includes surgical entry into tissues, cavities or organs or repair of traumatic injuries. Exposure prone procedures form a subset of invasive procedures.” *NSW Health (2005) HIV, Hepatitis B or Hepatitis C - Health Care Workers Infected*

**Placement** refers to a practical educational experience, a required component of a course or degree program, in a health or human services facility that may be on campus or off campus. It is also known as professional practice, work-placement, work experience, work-integrated learning placement, fieldwork, practicum, internship, clinical experience, clinical placement or practical work.

A placement may fall within one of the following categories:

- Clinical placement
- Service-orientated placement
- Community placement
- Organisational placement
- Laboratory placement
- Research placement
- Environmental health placement

Placements may be outside of the Brisbane metropolitan/Gold Coast area including Northern New South Wales and (by negotiation) in other States or overseas. A student may or may not be concurrently employed by the organisation in which the placement is undertaken.
School means the University school or department of the University hosting the students Degree Program.

University means Griffith University.

4.0 Principles

4.1 Duty of care

The University owes a duty of care towards its students to minimise the risk of contracting infectious diseases in the course of their studies. Just as importantly, the University and individual students also owe a duty of care to patients/clients with whom students interact to minimise the risk of their acquiring infectious diseases as a result of that interaction.

4.2 Ethical responsibilities

Health care workers have an ethical duty to take all reasonable steps to protect patients/clients with whom they interact from adverse outcomes including the acquisition of avoidable infectious diseases.

4.3 Confidentiality

The confidentiality of students concerning all personal matters, including their infection status in relation to blood borne viruses should be respected.

4.4 Discrimination

Students who are living with a blood borne virus will not be subjected to any form of discrimination apart from preclusion from participating in exposure prone procedures.

If exposure prone procedures are a required component of the degree program every effort will be made by the University to facilitate transfer of a student with a blood borne virus to another program where the student will not be called upon to undertake exposure prone procedures.

4.5 Conscientious objection to immunisation

Facilities and the University owe a duty of care towards its students and patients/clients, therefore un-vaccinated health care workers are not permitted to undertake invasive procedures or work with specific patient/client groups.

In order to undertake a placement a student must comply with the immunisation requirements of the facility. Where a student objects to a vaccination that is a requirement to be placed at a facility the University will use all reasonable efforts to arrange alternative placements that have no immunisation requirements. However, where the placement is a requirement to complete the degree program and there is no alternative placement available, or where invasive procedures are normal procedures in a particular health profession, the student may have their enrolment in the program terminated, pursuant to the Inability to Complete Required Components of Professional Qualification Policy. Every effort will be made by the University to facilitate transfer of the student to another program where there are no professional placement restrictions.
5.0 Student responsibilities

5.1 Enrolment requirements

The duties and experiences of students participating in placements will vary according to the course/degree program in which they are enrolled and the facilities in which placement will occur. The requirements for immunisation and testing for blood borne viruses are specified for individual degree programs on the program catalogue at http://www.griffith.edu.au/programs-courses (view the ‘attendance and work placement’ page and refer to the immunisation section).

5.1.1 Prior to commencing a placement students are required to

- meet all of the requirements of their degree program in relation to immunisation and testing for blood borne viruses, as outlined on the program catalogue.
- visit a medical practitioner who must complete and sign the required sections of the Immunisation and Health Record Form. Students are responsible for all costs associated with meeting the immunisation and health requirements. Medicare does not cover course-related fees therefore all items will be privately billed.
- provide evidence of hepatitis B vaccination and immunity, where specified as required for a degree program on the program catalogue.
  - Queensland Health and Mater Misericordiae require all student health care workers to provide evidence of hepatitis B vaccination.
  - NSW Health requires all student health care workers to provide evidence of hepatitis B protection from vaccination (i.e. evidence of vaccination and proof of immunity) or infection.
- complete the form Non-responder to hepatitis B vaccination – Acknowledgement found in the Guidelines on Hepatitis B Immunisation if, after an initial course of hepatitis B immunisation, anti-hepatitis B antibodies (HBsAb) are less than 10 mIU/mL.
- comply with the Guidelines on Hepatitis B Immunisation and the Guidelines on Tuberculosis Assessment and Screening.

5.1.2 In year 1, prior to the semester 1 Census date, students enrolled in medicine, dentistry, oral health therapy, periodontology, nursing and midwifery must complete the Exposure Prone Procedure Declaration Form.

5.2 Vaccination

In accordance with Queensland Health Policy for Immunisation of Health Care Workers and NSW Health Policy Directive: Occupational Assessment, Screening & Vaccination Against Specified Infectious Diseases, the University recommends students be vaccinated in accordance with the latest edition of the Australian Immunisation Handbook.

For information on diseases and vaccination procedures students should refer to the Australian Immunisation Handbook and discuss any concerns with a medical practitioner.

Prior to any vaccination students should discuss vaccine contraindications with their medical practitioner. Contraindications to vaccinations are given in the latest edition of the Australian Immunisation Handbook.
Students are responsible for all costs associated with meeting vaccination requirements. Medicare does not cover course-related fees therefore all items will be privately billed.

Non-participation in the vaccination requirements may increase a student’s risk of contracting disease through exposure to infected patients/clients in the clinical setting and could also lead to the refusal of a facility from accepting a student for placement and thus may prevent a student from meeting required components of their degree program.

### 5.3 Testing for blood borne viruses

All students are required to be aware of their status with regard to infection with the following organisms prior to their placement:

- human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)
- hepatitis B virus (HBV)
- hepatitis C virus (HCV)

Students enrolled in medicine, dentistry, oral health therapy, periodontology, nursing and midwifery may be called upon to undertake exposure prone procedures throughout the course of their study. Students enrolled in one of these programs are required to complete the *Exposure Prone Procedure Declaration Form* in year 1 prior to the semester 1 Census date.

Testing for evidence of current infection with these viruses should be within the six months prior to commencing studies or as soon as practicable after enrolment in the degree program and prior to their first clinical placement. Students in these programs should have repeat testing for these viruses annually while enrolled. If subsequent testing indicates that they have acquired any of the infections whilst enrolled in the program, they should immediately refrain from undertaking exposure prone procedures and seek urgent confidential advice from an appropriate placement staff member in their school.

Students in these programs who have been at risk of acquiring a blood borne virus (through an occupational exposure or through unprotected sexual intercourse or unsafe injecting practice with a partner whose infection status is not definitively known) have an ethical responsibility to arrange further blood borne virus testing at an appropriate interval after any exposure. They must refrain from participating in exposure prone procedures until they have been definitively determined not to be infected.

### 5.4 Students who are living with a blood borne virus

The Queensland Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 prohibits discrimination on the grounds of impairment (which includes the presence of blood borne virus). Infected students are entitled to confidentiality and support. In the event that a student considers he/she has been discriminated against, they will have recourse to the University Policy on Student Grievances and Appeals.

Students who are aware that they are living with a blood borne virus may still be able to participate in placement however they must not participate in exposure prone procedures, and like all health care workers must strictly adhere to standard infection control precautions. Where exposure prone procedures are a requirement to complete the degree program an infected student will not be able to meet the required clinical components of a degree program. Every effort will be made by the University to facilitate transfer of the student to another program where there are no professional placement restrictions.

Should a student living with a blood borne virus fail to exclude themselves from exposure prone procedures the process for managing suitability for placement, as outlined in the *Inability to Complete Required Components of Professional Qualification Policy*, will be initiated.
Students or prospective students are not required to disclose their infection status for HIV or HCV to the School or University. They are, however, strongly encouraged to confidentially discuss their status with the Program Convenor/Academic Placement Coordinator in their School, so that they can be assisted to consider how their training and future practice may need to be modified to ensure that patients/clients are not put at risk.

Students are required to notify the Program Convenor/Academic Placement Coordinator in their School if they have current hepatitis B infection. This information will be kept in the strictest confidence in secure storage but is necessary since many clinical institutions to which students are placed have a mandatory requirement for hepatitis B immunisation and confidential negotiation with the institution will be required.

5.5  Compliance with State Government and University infection control guidelines

All students are required to read and comply with the infection control guidelines issued by the health department in each State in which they undertake placements.

Students are also required to participate in any infection control training provided by their School from time to time.

5.6  Management of exposure to blood or body substances

Exposure to blood or other body substances may occur from:

- Injuries from all sharp instruments contaminated with blood or body substances
- Splashes to mucous membranes from blood and body substances
- Splashes to non-intact skin from blood and body substances
- Spillage of blood to large areas of intact skin

Adherence to standard infection control guidelines remains the first line of protection for health care workers against occupational exposure to blood borne viruses. However, once an injury has occurred it is important to follow an accepted protocol and medical regime.

5.6.1  Initial Management

After exposure to blood or other body substances the health care worker should as soon as possible do the following:

- Gently encourage bleeding if skin is not intact.
- Wash the area of contamination well with soap and water.
- Place a dressing if required.
- If the eyes have become contaminated rinse gently but thoroughly with water or normal saline while they are open. Rinsing should be for at least 30 seconds.
- If clothing is contaminated, remove and shower if necessary.
- If blood or other body substances are sprayed in the mouth spit out and then rinse the mouth with water several times.
- Inform the appropriate person (such as immediate placement supervisor) to ensure necessary further action is undertaken.

Where water is not available use of a non-water cleanser or antiseptic should replace the use of soap and water for washing cuts or puncture of the skin or intact skin.

5.6.2  Reporting

All injuries are to be reported to an immediate placement supervisor:

- Ensure that a Griffith University Incident Injury Report form is completed and signed by the immediate placement supervisor.
If the injury takes place at an off campus facility any procedures and incident/injury report forms of the Facility should also be completed. The student should present to a First Aid Officer or the emergency department at the nearest hospital if necessary. The student should be referred to a medical doctor for on-going medical management and prophylaxis should be offered on the basis of the risk of infection associated with the injury or exposure.

6.0 School responsibilities

6.1 Ensuring student compliance

Schools will inform students, prior to a placement and where relevant, of the need to be aware of their immunisation and blood borne virus status. They will also notify students within a reasonable timeframe of changes or additions to requirements with which students must comply.

Screening for infections and administration of vaccines and other medical treatment is not the direct responsibility of Schools, but the School is responsible for collecting/sighting documentation of compliance where this is required of the student.

6.2 Protecting student confidentiality

The School is responsible for ensuring that no information gathered through the operation of this policy is disclosed to any person outside of the provisions of the policy without the student’s express consent.

6.3 Protecting students from harassment and discrimination

The School is required to take all reasonable steps to provide an environment in which students who are living with a blood borne virus are protected from discrimination and the effects of stigma in relation to their infection.

6.4 Providing advice, support and referral

The School is responsible for providing appropriate advice, support and referral (eg. to an Infectious Disease Physician) to students in relation to immunisation and blood borne viruses. Students in need of assistance should contact the School’s Program Convenor/Academic Placement Coordinator.

6.5 Occupational Health and Safety: preventing the transmission of infectious diseases

The University and Schools are committed to the safety of students and patients/clients. The School is required to actively promote measures to prevent or minimise the risk of transmission of infectious diseases including risk assessment of required activities, infection control practices/training, immunisations, serological and other testing of immunity and student access to health and safety documents/programs within facilities.