21st September, 2017

Dear Student,

**Important: Global Shortage of Hepatitis B – Information for students commencing healthcare programmes September 2017.**

In conjunction with the information that you will have received from our occupational health provider, I am updating you on actions to support you with regards to the global shortage of Hepatitis B vaccine and your practice placements.

To confirm, due to the national shortage in Hepatitis B Vaccine, no 1st year students will receive the vaccine until approximately Spring, 2018.  Once new supplies are available from early 2018, students will be recalled for vaccination. Our occupational health provider has advised that practice placement is still appropriate until then. However, the following actions will enable you to undertake placement:

1. You must review the information leaflet already sent to you by our occupational health provider that specifically refers to this (attached for convenience).
2. During your face to face meeting with our occupational health provider this issue will be covered and you will have the opportunity to discuss any concerns.
3. You will undertake preparatory sessions at Bournemouth University relating to infection prevention and control that will support you to practice effectively in placement. You will be able to discuss this facet during those sessions.
4. Standard / universal infection prevention and control practices are of utmost importance regardless of Hepatitis B immunity and are the most effective method of avoiding contamination. You must therefore adhere to these practices at all times during placement.
5. If you are a student undertaking midwifery, operating department practice or paramedic science you would usually be vaccinated and prepared to undertake exposure prone procedures at the start of your course although you would not normally undertake exposure prone procedures in year 1. Regardless, you must not undertake any exposure prone procedure until you have been fully cleared for these procedures which would include Hepatitis B immunity (not likely to be until Spring 2018).
6. An exposure prone procedure is a ‘*Procedures where the worker’s gloved hands may be in contact with sharp instruments, needle tips or sharp tissues inside a patient’s open body cavity, wound or confined anatomical space, where the hands or fingertips may not be completely visible at all times’ (PHE, 2017).*
7. While exposure prone procedures are not an expectation of any year 1 student you must be extremely careful and adhere to standard / universal infection prevention and control practices whilst in situations where staff are undertaking these and decline to participate in that procedure.
8. Practice placements are being formally notified of your situation and actions to prepare you for placement. We are asking that all staff are aware. You may also want to take a copy of this letter to placement in case you want to refer to it.

**Hepatitis B – the disease**

Hepatitis B is caused by the Hepatitis B virus. Infection doesn’t often cause symptoms but when it does it leads to flu-like symptoms, including tiredness, fever, loss of appetite, sickness and diarrhoea, tummy (abdominal) pain and yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice). These symptoms usually appear two to three months after ‘exposure’ to the infection and normally pass after one to three months.

**Hepatitis B – how it is spread?**

Hepatitis B is uncommon in the UK and so the risk of catching infection in the UK is low. The virus is present in the blood of infected people, and in some other body fluids which may be contaminated with tiny amounts of blood. The infection spreads by blood to blood contact – for example when the virus gets into your bloodstream through a cut, scratch, or a contaminated needle.

***It cannot be spread by kissing, holding hands, hugging, coughing, sneezing, or sharing crockery and utensils***.

**How to reduce the risk of becoming infected**

Certain jobs can put people at risk because they involve contact with body fluids. This includes healthcare workers. Ideally, you should avoid activities where you may be exposed to blood and body fluids until you are fully vaccinated. You should also protect yourself and others by taking care when handling and disposing of sharp instruments (e.g. by wearing gloves and washing your hands). Ensure all surfaces are disinfected properly and dispose of contaminated waste safely.

Medical conditions that require procedures involving transfer of blood, for example renal dialysis, increase the risk of passing on infection. The risk from renal dialysis in the UK is extremely low, as all staff and patients are vaccinated, patients are tested regularly and those with hepatitis B infection are dialysed separately. Despite this, you should avoid contact with surfaces or objects that may be contaminated with blood and take precautions such as wearing gloves.

**What to do if you are exposed**

If, for example, you sustain a needlestick injury/splash, you should report this immediately through your placement provider **and** seek urgent advice from the local Occupational Health department (the one that your placement provider would access). Having a dose of vaccine promptly after the incident can still help to protect you from Hepatitis B.

Finally, please do ensure you are familiar with the information provided by our occupational health provider but do not hesitate to raise any queries during your appointment with them or your academic advisor.

Yours sincerely,



Amanda Watson, Head of Practice Education, Faculty of Health & Social Sciences, Bournemouth University.