

Pertussis: occupational vaccination of healthcare workers

Following advice from our Occupational Health providers at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals 'Sheffield Occupational Health Service' we will be commencing a Pertussis (Whooping Cough) immunisation programme from February 2020 for current students in defined roles. This programme will comply with new Public Health England (PHE) guidance (Pertussis: occupational vaccination of healthcare workers, pub.16/07/19).

As described in the guidance, students will be immunised in priority order commencing with student midwives from Priority Group 1.

Priority Group 1

- Health Care Workers with regular and close contact with non-vaccinated young infants and women in the last month of pregnancy (e.g. midwifery, obstetric and maternity settings)
- Neonatal and paediatric intensive care staff who are likely to have close and /or prolonged clinical contact with non-vaccinated young infants

What is Pertussis?

Pertussis (whooping cough) is an acute bacterial respiratory infection. Initial symptoms resemble a common cold which can progress to include spasmodic coughing, choking spells, and vomiting after coughing.

The risk of severe complications is highest in very young babies; nearly 90% of the deaths from pertussis in the last 10 years have been in infants aged 3 months or less who cannot be fully protected by immunisation.

In adults, the characteristic 'whoop' noise can be absent on coughing, but it is usually an unpleasant illness that can be difficult to diagnose; sometimes the only symptom is a cough which can be severe and may persist for months.

The bacteria are present in the back of the throat and can be spread by coughing and sneezing. An infected person can pass the infection to other people for 21 days from the onset of their symptoms if not treated with appropriate antibiotics.

Why do we need to immunise against Pertussis?

Healthcare workers are an important source of pertussis infection to vulnerable infants. The number of reported cases and incidents in recent years linked to healthcare settings in England has increased. In addition to putting vulnerable infants at risk of disease, such incidents have been disruptive and resource-intensive, requiring staff exclusion, extensive contact-tracing, antibiotic chemoprophylaxis and immunisation in line with existing PHE Guidelines.

Failure to comply with PHE guidance represents a significant risk should a nosocomial transmission – student to patient, mother or child, occur.

How often do I need to be immunised?

A Pertussis immunisation requires a booster after 5 years.

- If you have not had a Pertussis immunisation within the last 5 years and you are in a defined role, you will be vaccinated in line with the outlined priority order as advised by our Occupational Health provider. The immunisation will be recorded in your immunisation record. Due to the course length and the maximum duration to complete your course, it's unlikely a booster will be required whilst enrolled at Sheffield Hallam University.
- If you provide evidence that you have received a Pertussis immunisation within the last 5 years (e.g. through pregnancy) this will be recorded on your immunisation record. You will be recalled 5 years from the date of your original immunisation for a booster if you are still a Sheffield Hallam University student in a defined role.

Pertussis vaccine will subsequently be included in the routine immunisation programme for new students in defined roles.

Consent

The immunisation will be administered by a qualified occupational health nurse who will check to ensure you are suitable to receive the immunisation. All pertussis-containing vaccines are inactivated so do not contain live organisms and cannot cause the diseases they protect against.

Next steps

The Professional Issues Team will work with our Occupational Health provider and course teams to target students in priority order and identify a suitable date(s) for immunisation. Students will be invited to a mandatory appointment that should be prioritised around campus based learning and off duty.

Not attending the appointment may result in a placement being paused until the vaccine or evidence of vaccination in the last 5 years has been received.

A student from a defined role that has commenced vaccination and has taken a break in study will be required to receive the vaccine or provide evidence it has been received in the last 5 years before being permitted access to placement. Students will be advised to contact Occupational Health to arrange this appointment as part of their return to the course.