

The Medical Students Committee is representing medical student views on a working group which has been set up by the Medical Schools Council to develop a protocol for medical schools on testing.

FOCUS ON...

Testing medical students for Blood Borne Viruses

- What is testing for blood borne viruses?
- Do I need to be tested?
- What do I do if I'm offered a test?

If you are a new – or even not so new – student you might find that your medical school asks you to undergo testing for blood borne viruses (BBV) and TB – HepB, HepC, and HIV. This short guidance note from the BMA's Medical Students Committee (MSC) gives an explanation about why you may be asked to be tested by your medical school and what we think you should be able to expect.

Further detail and background is attached to this guidance note as an annex.

Why you would need to have the tests

You will need to have these tests if you want to carry out what are known as Exposure Prone Procedures (EPP) during your course. These are procedures where there is a risk of exposure of a patient's open tissues to your blood, for example, assisting in a caesarean.

You do not have to carry out EPPs to qualify as a doctor but some medical courses include some experience or offer EPPs as part of the basic training. The Medical Students Committee believes that you should not be prevented from assisting in EPPs if you want to do this but if you do want to carry out EPPs you will need to be tested.

If you don't want to have the test then you will not be able to carry out EPPs. This is perfectly acceptable. It should not affect your entry to medical school, or continuing or completing your course.

If you are offered the test

You should be given information beforehand about the tests and time to discuss these with an occupational health practitioner before making a decision. You should be told:

- about the implications of either refusing to test or of a positive result, on your studies and future career options i.e. that you may be restricted in the type of work you wish to undertake.
- that the test is not compulsory.
- that any refusal to have the test will not affect your access to medical school or the continuation or completion of your course.
- that the discussion will be confidential.

Remember – testing is not compulsory

If you are tested

The results of any test should remain completely confidential and there should be full support for you including pre- and post- test counselling as well as occupational health support if you need it.

If you test positive

You should be given:

- Occupational health support.
- Careers guidance so that you can make informed decisions about your future career.

Cost

Medical students should not bear the cost of testing for BBVs at any stage.

The test

You may not wish to be tested but there are advantages in being tested

- Early treatment and support if you are tested positive.
- The ability to make informed decisions about your career.
- Patient safety.

Electives

It is possible that you will be offered to participate in carrying out EPPs whilst on elective. It is sensible to apply the same standards of practise as you would in the UK. Therefore if you choose not to be tested or test positive whilst at medical school, it is recommended that you do not carry out EPPs whilst on elective.

Whether or not you are 'cleared' for EPPs in the UK, in some countries or areas you should consider carefully whether you should participate in EPPs as some areas carry more risk than others.

What is MSC doing

The Medical Students Committee is representing medical student views on the working group which has been set up by the Medical Schools Council to develop a protocol for medical schools on testing. We have made our views clear and have developed this guidance. We will keep medical students updated through updates of this guidance and through our newsletter *MSC News* which is available on our website at www.bma.org.uk/students

What you can do

Do not feel pressured into being tested.

If you hear of any compulsory testing taking place at your medical school, please inform your MSC representative who will take the matter up on behalf of the students at your school. Details can be found on our website at: <http://www.bma.org.uk/ap.nsf/Content/Hubmedicalstudentscommittees>
Contact AskBMA at Tel: 0870 60 60 828, email: askbma@bma.org.uk
Feel free to use the information in this guidance note to raise any concerns with your medical school.

Further sources of information and support

- BMA Counselling Service (24 hours a day, seven days a week)
- Doctors for Doctors. Telephone 08459 200 169 (calls charged at local rates)
www.bma.org.uk/doctorsfordoctors
- The Terrence Higgins Trust: <http://www.tht.org.uk/>
- AVERT: <http://www.avert.org/>
- The National AIDS and Sexual Health line: 0800 567 123
- The Hepatitis C Trust: <http://www.hepcuk.info/data/UserContentRoot/Home/>
- The Hepatitis B Foundation UK: <http://www.hepb.org.uk/>

ANNEX

Background

In March 2007 the Department of Health (DH) published *'Health clearance for tuberculosis, hepatitis B hepatitis C and HIV: New healthcare workers'*.

The DH guidance recommends that all new healthcare workers have checks for tuberculosis disease/immunity and are offered hepatitis B immunisation, with post-immunisation testing of response and the offer of tests for hepatitis C and HIV.

For new healthcare workers who will perform exposure-prone procedures (EPPs)¹ it recommends that *additional health clearance* should also be undertaken including HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C
Medical students

Medical students are, for the purposes of the guidance, classed as healthcare workers.

Exposure Prone Procedures

The GMC no longer requires students to undertake Exposure Prone Procedures during medical training and the Department of Health guidance acknowledges this. The guidance recommends additional health clearance for those students who will be involved in EPPs. Many students have the opportunity to undertake EPPs during their training and in order for this to continue, will require BVV clearance.

Medical Schools Council

The Medical Schools Council has established a working group, with membership drawn from the four UK Departments of Health, the Association of UK University Hospitals and the BMA, to produce a protocol for Medical Schools based on the DH guidance. The group is currently developing the guidance which is likely to be finalised at the end of 2007. It is likely to emphasise support, counselling and treatment where necessary for medical students undergoing testing.

Medical Students Committee position is as follows:

- The MSC remains against compulsory testing for BBV
- The setting of a consistent and achievable policy on the screening of medical students before entry is vital to avoid inappropriate testing, inappropriate exclusion of potential students, and inconsistencies between medical schools
- The MSC therefore recommends a national standard of best practice to include – standard information, protocols, treatments codes of practice
- Students who have opportunity to carry out EPPs whether through medical school or on elective, should continue to have this opportunity. It is accepted that in order to do this they will be tested for BBV.
- Students who refuse a test or who test positive should not be restricted from either entering medical school or from completing their studies leading to full registration with the GMC, in keeping with the treatment of other healthcare workers in the DH guidance.
- There should be full information for students prior to being offered testing. This information should include:
 - the implications of either refusing to test or of a positive result, on their studies and their future career options i.e. that they may be restricted in the type of work they wish to undertake.
 - explicit reference to the fact that the test is not compulsory nor will any refusal to have the test affect their access to medical school or the continuation or completion of their course.
- The results of any test should remain completely confidential and there should be full support for medical students including pre- and post- test counselling as well as occupational health support for those who need it.
- Careers guidance for those who test positive should be provided in order to enable individuals to make informed decisions about their future.
- Medical students should not bear the cost of testing for BBVs at any stage.

¹ The DH Defines EPPs as – those invasive procedures where there is a risk that injury to the worker may result in the exposure of the patient's open tissues to the blood of the worker. These include procedures where the worker's gloved hands may be in contact with sharp instruments, needle tips or sharp tissues (e.g. spicules of bone or teeth) 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.