

 <b>DALHOUSIE</b> UNIVERSITY FACULTY OF MEDICINE  <b>Policy for Undergraduate Students with a Communicable Infection</b>	<b>Policy sponsor:</b> Dean	<b>Approval date:</b> October 9 2007
	<b>Responsible unit:</b> UGME & Student Affairs	<b>Amendments:</b> Approved by Faculty Council June 4, 2024

## A. Background & Purpose

To outline the course of action to be taken when an undergraduate student in the Faculty of Medicine has a communicable infection.

The Faculty of Medicine at Dalhousie University is committed to protecting and maintaining the rights of patients and health care workers as well as the integrity of the educational process of medical professionals. To study or work in the health care professions is a privilege offered to those who are prepared for a lifetime of service to the public. Students, faculty, and health care workers (HCW) have a fundamental responsibility to provide care to all patients assigned to them. A failure to accept this responsibility violates a basic tenet of the medical profession – to place the patient’s interest and welfare first. Given that medical students may perform procedures (exposure prone procedures) in which transmission of an infectious agent a patient may occur, they have an ethical obligation to their patients to know their own infectious disease status where that may impact on the health of the patient. Students in health care professions are at risk of contracting infectious diseases while providing patient care.<sup>1 2 3 4 5</sup>

A policy of mandatory immunizations combined with consistent application of infection prevention and control practices helps to protect both a student and patients from transmissible infectious diseases. This is in addition to standard infection control practices applicable during all routine patient interactions. A patient’s right to informed consent may outweigh the worker’s right to privacy when a recognized risk of disease transmission is present.

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<sup>1</sup> . Public Health Agency of Canada. Guideline on the Prevention of Transmission of Bloodborne Viruses from Infected Healthcare Workers in Healthcare Settings. Ottawa (ON): PHAC; 2019. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/infectious-diseases/nosocomial-occupationalinfections/prevention-transmission-bloodborne-viruses-healthcare-workers.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Gamester CF, Tilzey AJ, Banatvala JE. Medical students' risk of infection with bloodborne viruses at home and abroad: questionnaire survey. BMJ 1999; 318:158-60.

<sup>3</sup> Deisenhamener S, Radon K, Nowak D, Reichert J. Needlestick injuries during medical training. J Hosp Infect 2006; 63:263-7.

<sup>4</sup> Patterson JM, Novak CB, Mackinnon SE, Ellis RA. Needlestick injuries among medical students. Am J Infect Control 2003; 21:226-30.

<sup>5</sup> Berry AJ. Needle stick and other safety issues. Anesthesiol Clin North America 2004; 22:493-508.

## B. Application

Applies to all medical students studying at Dalhousie full-time and on also those students completing visiting electives.

## C. Definitions

**“Communicable Infections Committee”** There shall be a Communicable Infections Committee that shall comprise the Assistant Dean of Admissions, the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs, the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Medical Education, and a faculty member who is an infectious disease specialist who is appointed by the Department Head for the Department of Medicine. The latter member shall be appointed for a three (3) year term. The function of this Committee is to assist the Assistant Dean of Admissions, the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs, and the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Medical Education in counseling students, and in evaluating and structuring modifications to the Program as may be required by the student’s disease or immune status, as more particularly set out in this Policy.

**“Exposure-prone procedures”** is used for the purpose of managing the risk of bloodborne pathogens transmitted in Canada. They are procedures during which transmission of HBV, HCV or HIV from a health care worker or student to patients is most likely to occur and include the following: digital palpation of a needle tip in a body cavity (a hollow space within the body or one of its organs) or the simultaneous presence of the HCW's fingers and a needle or other sharp instrument or object in a blind or highly confined anatomic site, e.g. during major abdominal, cardiothoracic, vaginal and/or orthopedic operations, or repair of major traumatic injuries, or major cutting or removal of any oral or perioral tissue, including tooth structures”.

(Note: from the Public Health Agency of Canada’s consensus report on infected health care workers<sup>6</sup> which further states that this definition is quite broad in its scope and recommends that an expert panel make an informed decision based on factors in a specific case).

**“Program”** means the Faculty of Medicine program leading to a degree of Doctor of Medicine.

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<sup>6</sup> Ogunremi T, Defalco K, Johnston BL, Vearncombe M, Joffe AM, Cleghorn B, Cividino M, Wong DK, Mazzulli T, Wong J, Isinger MA, Robert Y, Boucoiran I, Dunn K, Henry B. Preventing transmission of bloodborne viruses from infected healthcare workers to patients: Summary of a new Canadian Guideline. Can Commun Dis Rep 2019;45(12):317–22. <https://doi.org/10.14745/ccdr.v45i12a03>

## D. Policy

This policy is consistent with the Canadian Medical Association's Code of Ethics which states, under "Responsibilities to Oneself"<sup>7</sup>:

"Seek help from colleagues and appropriate medical care from qualified professionals for personal and professional problems that might adversely affect your health and your services to patients."

The reporting obligations will be consistent with the requirements of the Nova Scotia government. This policy document should be reviewed annually by the Communicable Infections Committee to ensure that it remains up to date, and more frequently in the event in the if an infectious disease related concern is identified.

### 1.0 Hepatitis B (HBV)

Immunization and Immune status of students registered in the Program. The Faculty of Medicine will not refuse acceptance to the Program based on disease status. However, the HBV status of all students admitted to the Program is required to assess whether modification to the students' training in the Program is necessary to ensure patient and student safety.

**HBV immunization:** HBV immunization is required of all students registered in the Program prior to the end of first term of Med 1.

**Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV):** Students with risk factors for HIV and who are involved in exposure-prone procedures have a moral and ethical obligation to undergo HIV testing on a voluntary basis.

**Hepatitis C (HCV) Testing:** Students with risk factors for HCV and who are involved in exposure-prone procedures have a moral and ethical obligation to undergo HCV testing on a voluntary basis.

### 2.0 Other Communicable Infections and Medical Students

Any student who has or develops a communicable infection is required to inform the Assistant Dean of Admissions and the Assistant Dean Student Affairs to discuss whether this condition could impact on their ability to participate fully in the Program.

Students who have acute or chronic medical conditions that render them susceptible to infection should discuss with their personal physicians and the Assistant Dean of Admissions and the Assistant Dean Student Affairs whether the condition might affect their ability to safely perform their duties.

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<sup>7</sup> Canadian Medical Association Policy. CMA Code of Ethics, Update 2018. [CMA CODE OF ETHICS AND PROFESSIONALISM - PD19-03S2.pdf](#) (version current as of January 8, 2024).

## **E. Administrative Structure**

The Assistant Dean, Admissions shall receive results of:

- Post-immunization HBV antibody (HBsAb) testing
- Results of hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg) testing
- HIV serologic status
- Advise the Advisory Committee on Blood Borne Pathogens and ensure compliance with relevant policies through provincial licensing authorities (either the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia or the College of Physicians and Surgeons of New Brunswick).
- Provide career counseling to such students relative to their training and health status.

The Assistant Dean, Student Affairs shall receive results of:

- Post-immunization HBV antibody (HBsAb) testing
- Results of hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg) testing
- HIV serologic status  
Report a student's serologic status to the Communicable Infections Committee annually or after an exposure incident, until graduation from the Program, and ensure compliance with relevant policies through provincial licensing authorities (either the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia or the College of Physicians and Surgeons of New Brunswick).
- Provide career counseling to such students relative to their training and HBV, HBC, or HIV health status.

The Communicable Infections Committee shall:

- Provide counseling to such students relative to their training and HBV, HBC, or HIV health status.

## **F. Procedures**

The following procedures are consistent with

### **1.0 Hepatitis B virus:**

Students shall provide results of post-immunization HBV antibody (HBsAb) testing to the Assistant Dean, Admissions and the Assistant Dean, Student Affairs.

The course of action to be followed based on the Hepatitis B serological results <sup>8</sup> are summarized below:

**HBsAg positive:**

Students whose serologic profile indicates that they are HBsAg positive will be evaluated by the Communicable Infections Committee to determine whether their clinical experiences require modification to allow them to complete Program requirements while at the same time ensuring patient and student safety. The Communicable Infections Committee shall assist in developing any such modifications and will provide counseling to the student as may be required. Every reasonable attempt will be made to ensure that the learning objectives of the curriculum are met, but this may not be possible in all cases. Career counseling to such students will be provided by the Assistant Dean, Admissions and the Assistant Dean, Student Affairs, as the range of postgraduate programs for which student may be eligible may be limited, including but not limited to, the surgical disciplines. The Assistant Dean of Admissions and the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs shall ensure that the student is compliant with any reporting requirements through the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia/New Brunswick.

The purpose of excluding HBsAg positive students with an increased likelihood of transmitting HBV from surgical procedures and surgical training is to protect patients from acquiring HBV. <sup>8</sup>

Medical students infected with HBV require appropriate medical care and should avoid performing exposure prone medical procedures until:

- The medical student is under care from a physician with expertise in HBV management.
- The medical students HBV DNA is < 10<sup>3</sup> IU/mL and monitored regularly (every 3-6 months)
- Approval has been obtained from the Communicable Infections Committee.

**Non-responders to Hepatitis B vaccination:**

Individuals who have been vaccinated but are either non-responders or have inadequate antibody titres after completing two series (three doses/series) of HBV vaccine.

These students will be required to sign the Agreement Form for HBsAg testing (Appendix 1) and to undergo serologic testing on an annual basis.

The student's HBsAb and HBsAg status must be reported to the Communicable Infections Committee annually or after an exposure incident, until graduation from the Program.

The Communicable Infections Committee shall provide counseling to such students relative to their training and health status. Career counseling will be provided to such students by the Assistant Dean of Admissions and the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs.

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<sup>8</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada. Guideline on the Prevention of Transmission of Bloodborne Viruses from Infected Healthcare Workers in Healthcare Settings. Ottawa (ON): PHAC; 2019. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/infectious-diseases/nosocomial-occupationalinfections/prevention-transmission-bloodborne-viruses-healthcare-workers.html>

**Declination of Hepatitis B vaccine:**

Students declining to be immunized against HBV on religious or similar grounds or for medical reasons are to be counseled by the Communicable Infections Committee. Their request for a waiver of the immunization requirements set out in this policy will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Such students must sign The Agreement Form for HBsAb and HBsAg Testing (Appendix 1) and the Hepatitis B Vaccine Declination Statement (Appendix 2) and to undergo annual serologic testing to be allowed to continue their studies.

**2.0 HIV Testing**

HIV infected students will be counseled by the Communicable Infections Committee. The Assistant Dean of Admissions and the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs will notify the Advisory Committee on Blood Borne Pathogens and ensure that the student is compliant with any reporting requirements through the Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia and/or New Brunswick.

Medical students infected with HIV are expected to be under the care of a physician experienced in HIV management. Students on anti-retroviral therapy (ART) with undetectable viral loads are not at risk for transmission of HIV to patients.

Medical students infected with HIV will be restricted from performing exposure prone procedures until:

- They are under the care of a person with expertise in HIV management.
- They are on ART with an undetectable viral load or have been identified as an elite controller.
- Approval has been obtained from the Communicable Infections Committee.

**3.0 Hepatitis C (HCV)**

HCV infected students will be counseled by the Communicable Infections Committee. The Assistant Dean of Admissions and the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs will ensure that the student is compliant with any reporting requirements through the Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia and/or New Brunswick.

Students with HCV infection (defined as RNA positive) will be restricted from performing exposure prone procedures until:

- The medical student is under the care of a physician with expertise in HCV management.
- The medical student has completed effective therapy for HCV and has a negative post treatment RNA at 12 weeks.
- Approval has been obtained from the Communicable Infections Committee.

#### **4.0 Other Communicable Infections and Medical Students**

At times, other transmissible infectious diseases may pose a risk to the health of the student body or that of the patients and community that we serve. The Assistant Dean of Admissions and the Assistant Dean Student Affairs of the relevant campus for registered students may engage in counseling the student, in evaluating the need for modification to the student's participation in the Program and in structuring any required modifications.

## Appendix 1

### Agreement Form for Yearly Hepatitis Ab and Ag and/or Viral DNA Testing

Hepatitis B is an occupational risk as a health care provider. I understand that due to my serology results, I remain susceptible to Hepatitis B.

*I agree to undergo serological testing on an annual basis or on a schedule determined by the Communicable Infections Advisory Group (due to an exposure incident) until graduation from the clinical program.*

Student Name

Student Signature

Assistant Dean of Admissions

Assistant Dean of Admissions Signature

Assistant Dean of Student Affairs

Assistant Dean of Student Affairs  
Signature

Date

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## Appendix 2

### Hepatitis B Vaccination Declination Statement

I understand that as a medical student, I am at risk of acquiring a hepatitis B (HBV) infection due to occupational exposure to blood and or other body fluids. I have been advised that vaccination is a requirement of the clinical programs. I have been provided with counseling and information regarding hepatitis B. The efficacy, safety issues and benefits regarding the hepatitis B vaccination have been explained to me. However, I decline the vaccine at this time. I agree to sign the **Agreement Form for Yearly Hepatitis Ab and Ag and/or Viral DNA Testing** as a condition of acceptance into the clinical program.

Student Name

Student Signature

Assistant Dean of Admissions

Assistant Dean of Admissions Signature

Assistant Dean of Student Affairs

Assistant Dean of Student Affairs  
Signature

Date

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