

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Addressing vaccine preventable disease: Occupational assessment, screening, and vaccination Policy

#### **Why is the [Addressing vaccine preventable disease: Occupational assessment, screening, and vaccination Policy](#) needed?**

The Policy supports a consistent approach to management of occupational assessment, screening and vaccination and facilitates SA Health meeting its duty of care and responsibility under the [Work Health and Safety Act 2012 \(SA\)](#) to minimise the risk of disease transmission in the workplace. .

For accreditation purposes, SA Health services are also required to comply with the [Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care's National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards \(NSQHS\)](#) which include the requirement for a workforce screening and immunisation program that complies with current national guidelines.

#### **Do other jurisdictions in Australia have a similar Health Care Worker Policies?**

Yes. All jurisdictions in Australia have established systems to ensure that all health care workers are appropriately assessed, screened and vaccinated to minimise the risk of transmission of vaccine-preventable diseases.

#### **Does the Policy make it compulsory for me to be vaccinated and screened for TB?**

Vaccine and screening requirements are set out in [Mandatory Instruction 1: Risk assessment, screening and vaccination](#). In addition to the mandatory vaccination requirements for all SA Health roles under this Policy SA Health workers must also comply with any vaccination requirements imposed under legislation (including any directions under the [Emergency Management Act 2004](#) or the [South Australian Public Health Act 2011](#)) and any mandatory vaccination requirements under the terms and conditions of employment of employees.

Management approach for screening all current SA Health employees is outlined in [Mandatory Instruction 2: Vaccination management \(refusal, non-responder, medical contraindications\)](#). Workplace modifications may be considered for current SA Health employees who are not immune to specific diseases, after a workplace and individual risk assessment is completed in conjunction with their manager.

#### **What vaccine preventable diseases are covered by the Policy?**

The Policy includes the vaccines recommended for people at risk of certain occupationally acquired vaccine preventable diseases, which includes health care workers, in [The Australian Immunisation Handbook](#) (online edition). In addition to these vaccines, SA Health workers must also comply with any vaccination requirements imposed under legislation (including any directions under the [Emergency Management Act 2004](#) or the [South Australian Public Health Act 2011](#)) and any mandatory vaccination requirements under the terms and conditions of employment of employees.

#### **Why must I be screened for TB?**

The intent of the Policy is to minimise the impact of TB in the workplace and facilitate the highest level of protection for the workforce as reasonably practicable, against harm from hazards and risks arising from work. The aim is to minimise the risk of transmission of TB to vulnerable populations.

#### **What documents will I need to produce to show evidence of immunity to these vaccine preventable diseases?**

[Mandatory Instruction 4: Vaccination / immune status requirements for specific vaccine preventable diseases](#) provides details of the vaccination/immune status requirements for specific

vaccine preventable diseases. The required evidence depends on the vaccine preventable disease.

**Can I provide a Statutory Declaration stating the vaccines I have received or stating that I am immune?**

No. [Mandatory Instruction 3: Acceptable evidence of immunity to specific vaccine preventable diseases](#) outlines what is acceptable evidence. The purpose of the Policy is for you to know your immune status to specific vaccine preventable diseases. A Statutory Declaration relies on recall of specific past infections or specific past vaccinations which may not be accurate.

**If I don't have records of the vaccinations I have received in the past, is it safe to have the vaccines again?**

Yes. Unless you have had a severe reaction to a previous vaccine or a vaccine component, or a medical contraindication to vaccination, it is safe to have repeat doses of vaccines.

**Who pays for the cost of any required screening tests, vaccinations or any required specialist medical assessment?**

Prospective employees, contractors and students accept the cost of any required immunisation or TB screening, unless the contracting agency agrees to cover these costs. Volunteers are responsible for these costs unless the relevant SA Health service has other arrangements in place.

For current SA Health employees SA Health is responsible for the costs of any required screening tests, recommended vaccinations and any required specialist medical assessment (for example, for employees with medical contraindications to vaccination or other specific medical conditions) to ensure compliance with the Policy.

**I do not want to receive vaccines. This Policy discriminates against me in limiting my work roles and responsibilities. How is this justified?**

Health care workers have both rights and responsibilities. You have the right to refuse recommended vaccinations and the right to a safe and healthy workplace. You also have a responsibility to minimise risks to other health care workers, patients, clients and visitors in SA Health services. There may be a tension between these rights and responsibilities, and the Policy seeks to achieve a balance within the context of best-practice public health, legislative and accreditation requirements.

**I had a serious reaction to a previous vaccine and have been told I should not have this vaccine again. How does this Policy affect me working or studying within a SA Health Service?**

If you have had an anaphylactic reaction (immediate life-threatening allergic reaction as determined by a medical practitioner) or other contraindication following a vaccine, or to any component of a vaccine, you should not have that vaccine or any vaccine with the same component. Depending on the actual vaccine or component, you may be able to continue to work/study in your current capacity within SA Health. However, you will be asked to produce documentation from a specialist doctor in relation to the anaphylactic reaction or other contraindication, and your circumstances may also require a review. Alternative work placements and/or restrictions might be considered, depending on your situation.

**I have had a full course of Hepatitis B vaccine, but the blood test shows I do not have a high enough level of immunity. How does this Policy affect me?**

A small proportion of people (about 5%) do not produce protective levels of antibodies following a course of Hepatitis B vaccine. If you do not have protective levels of antibody after the full Hepatitis B vaccination course then the guidelines for [Non-responders to Hepatitis B vaccine as recommended in the Australian Immunisation Handbook](#), online edition should be followed. In most cases, you can work in your current position in SA Health. You need to be aware of what you must do if you are exposed to Hepatitis B, for example, from a needle stick injury.

## **I am pregnant (or considering pregnancy). How does this Policy affect me?**

Pertussis, influenza and COVID-19 vaccinations are recommended for all pregnant women.

Pregnancy is considered a temporary contraindication to vaccination with measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) and chickenpox (varicella) vaccines as these are live vaccines. Depending on your work situation and your immune status, some work adjustments and/or work restrictions may be required during your pregnancy.

## **I am a current SA Health employee and do not want to be vaccinated. What kind of work adjustments and/or work restrictions might be considered for my situation?**

[Mandatory Instruction 2: Vaccination management \(refusal, non-responders, contraindications\)](#) outlines the process for management of screening and/or vaccine refusal, vaccination non-responders and exemptions, including medical exemption based on contraindications.

Work adjustments and/or restrictions will depend on several factors and therefore require a case-by-case assessment by your SA Health manager. Factors for consideration include, but are not limited to:

- your immune status to each of the vaccine preventable diseases covered in the Policy
- health and safety considerations in your workplace
- specific patient/client groups with whom you have contact
- susceptibility of each of these patient/client groups to each vaccine preventable disease
- probability of a serious illness with poor health outcomes among the patients/clients in these groups
- availability of recommended and feasible infection control measures to minimise spread of the infection for each situation.

## **What is the purpose of the Local Health Panel and who sits on this Panel?**

If you are a current SA Health employee and have not responded to a vaccine (non-responder), or you have a medical contraindication to certain vaccinations, a case-by-case assessment will be conducted by your SA Health Manager, followed by discussions with you to reach an acceptable outcome consistent with the Policy. If these discussions do not result in an acceptable outcome, a Local Health Panel may be convened to review your situation.

The Local Health Panel is a group of a minimum of two people convened to provide expertise in infection control and risk management in relation to matter specific to administration of this Policy within SA Health. It should include a nursing or medical expert from worker health, infection control or infectious diseases and a clinical expert from the area involved. The Local Health Panel reassess the risk and identify available management options to manage the risks consistent with the Policy.

## **How will the privacy of my medical records be ensured and who will have access to my records?**

All immunisation and health screening documentation for current SA Health employees are stored with other relevant occupational health records as an employee health record on the Health Assessment Screen (HAS) of the CHRIS 21 system. Your records are confidentially maintained by the relevant Worker/Staff Health services or Infection Prevention and Control Practitioners for Regional Local Health Networks and SA Health Dental Services. All storage and access processes are consistent with the Government of South Australia Cabinet Administrative Instruction Information Privacy Principles (IPPS) and State and Commonwealth Privacy legislation.

## **As a current SA Health employee, I am considering applying for another role within SA Health. Will I be required to repeat the immunisation and TB screening process before taking up this new position?**

Yes. SA Health staff moving to new positions in SA Health will be asked to complete the assessment before commencing a new role. This is to ensure you meet the mandatory screening and/or vaccination requirements of the new position.

**I am a student health care worker or applying for a health care worker position in SA Health. How long is it going to take to get the blood tests, vaccinations and paperwork through the system before I can start my studies or work?**

If you do not already have evidence of immunity for some of the vaccine preventable diseases covered by the Policy, you need to allow 4 to 6 weeks for the initial assessment, results from any required blood tests, and administration of any required vaccines, before being able to commence clinical placement or work. It is important that you commence this process early.

**I am a student health care worker or applying for a health care worker position in SA Health. I've just had my first Hepatitis B vaccine. Can I start my clinical placement or my SA Health employment after the first Hepatitis B vaccine?**

Yes. The Policy is clear that you can start a clinical placement (if a student) or start work (if a new employee) provided you have received the first Hepatitis B vaccine, and agreed to complete the full course of vaccination, have the blood test to check immunity after the last vaccine in the course, and then update your immunisation record.

**I am a locum, contractor or agency health care worker and may work in SA Health services. How does this Policy affect me?**

Locum, contractors or agency health care workers providing health care in SA Health services are expected to be compliant with the Policy. Your employer will require you to indicate that you are compliant with the Policy and record this information according to their own business processes and protocols as part of their own due diligence.

**I am a student health care worker or contractor and have heard SA Health will conduct random audits of non-SA Health workers to check compliance with the Policy. How will this be done and what measures will be in place to protect my privacy?**

If you are randomly selected for the audit you will be asked by an authorised SA Health staff member to show your supporting immunisation and health screening evidence indicating, you meet the requirements of the Policy. If you refuse to participate, your education provider, employer or agency will be notified.

---

For more information

**Specialist Services**

**Communicable Disease Control Branch**

**Level 3, 11 Hindmarsh Square ADELAIDE SA 5000**

**Telephone: [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au) Public-I2-A2**

© Department for Health and Ageing, Government of South Australia. All rights reserved.



[www.ausgoal.gov.au/creative-commons](http://www.ausgoal.gov.au/creative-commons)



**Government  
of South Australia**

SA Health