



**RCSI**

# **RCSI Bahrain Blood Borne Virus Policy**

## **AY 2026-27**

## Policy / Regulation History

### Blood Borne Virus Policy

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## **1. PURPOSE**

The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) is aware of its over-riding duty of care to the public with whom students are in close contact. In the rare circumstances where a student is shown to have a blood borne virus and is infectious, RCSI Bahrain will consider all appropriate measures and will do all that is reasonable to accommodate the needs of the student in question, in accordance with statutory requirements. RCSI Bahrain is obliged to ensure that it takes reasonable and appropriate measures not only to safeguard the students and their colleagues, but also patients and members of the public. Safeguarding these groups is of paramount importance.

## **2. POLICY STATEMENT**

This document is intended to ensure that all students are informed of the policy and procedures of RCSI Bahrain regarding blood borne viruses. This policy must be read carefully by students to ensure that they are fully aware of the contents. Students are responsible for complying with this policy. Failure to adhere to the provisions of this policy could result in a student being negatively impacted in their academic progress and excluded from RCSI Bahrain.

The transmission of blood borne pathogens within a healthcare setting has become a matter of increasing public concern and interest over a number of years. This policy is designed to protect students from acquiring a blood borne virus. In the rare instance where a student has acquired a blood borne virus, this policy will detail how to support and manage the case and acknowledges that the protection of patients and the public is paramount.

## **3. APPLICATION**

This policy is applicable to new undergraduate student applicants, as well as registered and continuing undergraduate students at RCSI Bahrain.

## **4. POLICY CONTENT**

### **4.1. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The prerequisite of good practice in any healthcare setting is the careful observation of basic hygiene and proper infection control procedures by all students. For this reason, particular attention is drawn to the avoidance of sharps/needle stick injuries, including the value of double gloving preoperatively where appropriate and the covering of skin lesions with waterproof dressings. Any student with exudative or weeping skin lesions must avoid direct patient contact and must not handle devices or equipment used during invasive procedures.

Students must adhere to all infection control policies that are in place within the hospitals/clinical sites where they are placed, as well as regulations and guidelines of the Ministry of Health, Kingdom of Bahrain.

## **4.2. RISK OF TRANSMISSION OF BLOOD BORNE VIRUSES TO PATIENTS**

### **Hepatitis B**

The transmission of hepatitis B Virus (HBV) from infected healthcare workers to patients has been well documented and the factors which predispose to transmission have been identified. They include the performance of invasive procedures (surgical or dental) and a high level of infectivity in the healthcare worker (HBe antigen positive or pre-core mutant positive).

### **Hepatitis C**

The major source of transmission of hepatitis C is by exposure to infected blood and body fluids. Cases involving transmission of hepatitis C from surgeons to patients have been well documented and have arisen in the context of cardiothoracic surgery, open heart surgery, gynaecological surgery and anaesthesiology.

### **HIV Transmission**

Studies have shown that the HIV virus can be transmitted to patients during both dental and surgical procedures.

## **4.3. EXPOSURE PRONE PROCEDURES**

Most contact between healthcare workers, students and patients does not involve the possibility of blood-to-blood contact and therefore carries low risk for transmission of blood borne pathogens. Provided infection control procedures are adhered to, Exposure Prone Procedures (EPP) are the only procedures associated with a risk of transmission of blood borne pathogens to patients.

EPPs are defined as procedures which involve surgical entry into tissues, cavities or organs or repair of major traumatic injuries, caesarean deliveries or other obstetric procedures during which sharp instruments are used such as perineal repair after a vaginal delivery; the manipulation, cutting or removal of any oral or perioral tissues including tooth structure, during which bleeding may occur.

In addition, EPPs relate to situations where the student or surgeon's hands (whether gloved or not) may be in contact with sharp instruments, needle tips or sharp tissues (spicules of bone or teeth), inside a patient's open body cavity, wound or confined anatomical space, and where the hands or fingertips may not be completely visible at all times.

Should the opportunity to electively participate in an EPP arise, students may not be able to participate unless they have recently been tested and shown not to carry a blood-borne virus.

#### **4.4. SCREENING OF STUDENTS**

It is the duty of all healthcare workers, including students, to protect themselves and their patients from disease. This includes being tested for blood borne viruses and infectious diseases, immunised if appropriate, and strictly adhering to standard precautions and codes of practice. There is a moral and legal obligation on both health service providers and healthcare workers to ensure the protection of workers and patients alike.

Accordingly, there is an ethical duty for healthcare professionals to protect patients from harm. A healthcare professional or student who knowingly puts patients at risk and who infects patients may be subject to a medical negligence case for breach of standard of care or indeed to prosecution for criminal negligence.

#### **4.5. RCSI SCREENING SCHEDULE**

All students must undergo infectious disease screening (which includes blood borne virus testing), prior to joining the university in accordance with the Ministry of Health, Kingdom of Bahrain regulations.

Repeat infectious disease testing may be required after registration. The requirements are defined in the “**Infectious disease Screening and Immunization Report**”, and according to Ministry of Health requirements.

Screening will be repeated throughout the student’s programme of study as required.

Specifics of required testing and schedule can be found in the “**Policy on General Health, Infectious Diseases Screening and Vaccination of RCSI Bahrain Students**” and the RCSI Bahrain “**Infectious Disease Screening and Immunization Report**”.

#### **4.6. MANAGEMENT OF STUDENTS INFECTED WITH BLOOD BORNE VIRUSES**

If a student tests positive for a blood borne virus at any stage during his/her programme of study, the Student Health and Wellbeing Unit is required to immediately notify the Disease Control Section at the Ministry of Health. Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and HIV are notifiable diseases according to the Ministry of Health regulations. This notification process is standardised and requires the provision of demographic details so that the public health authorities can undertake contact tracing if indicated, in order to ensure public safety. The student will be supported by the Student Health and Wellbeing Unit during this period.

If a student tests positive for a blood borne virus:

- **Bahraini students** will be referred to the Medical Commission, Kingdom of Bahrain for consideration of fitness to join or remain on the programme.

- **Non- Bahraini students** will not be eligible to join RCSI Bahrain or remain on the programme, according to Ministry of Health regulations. The Disease Control Section of the Ministry of Health will be notified of the positive result.

Any student who suspects that they may have been exposed to Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C or HIV **must notify the Student Health and Wellbeing Unit immediately** and seek professional advice and support, including the need for testing. They must cooperate with any look-back exercise (ie a check of patients with whom the person has had contact) deemed necessary in order to ensure patient and public safety. Students who fail to notify the appropriate authorities if they suspect that they have been exposed to a BBV are in breach of RCSI Bahrain's Code of Conduct and will be referred through the university's disciplinary process.

#### **4.7. PREVENTION OF BLOOD BORNE VIRUSES**

##### **Hepatitis B**

A safe and effective vaccine is available for the protection of students and others from infection with Hepatitis B virus. The vaccination for Hepatitis B consists of a series of 3 doses. The second dose should be administered one month after the first dose, and the third should be administered 6 months after the first one. Testing for the surface antibody to Hepatitis B (HBsAB) should be done at least one month after the vaccine series is completed. An HBsAB level of 10miu/ml or greater is considered to reflect an adequate response to the vaccine and confer immunity.

All students must be immunized against the hepatitis B virus, unless immunity to hepatitis B virus as a result of natural infection or previous immunization has been established, or the vaccine is contraindicated. It is essential that the treatment course is completed and that antibody levels post-vaccination are assessed prior to any clinical practice or placement.

**Student applicants to RCSI Bahrain who have not been previously vaccinated for Hepatitis B should begin this vaccination process no later than the February 1st prior to possible registration date.**

New student applicants must have the RCSI Bahrain Infectious Disease Screening and Immunization Report completed by a licensed healthcare provider prior to registration. Proof of Hepatitis B vaccination and documentation of antibody levels is required.

Following vaccination, there are two required Hepatitis B tests; the Hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAG) test, and Hepatitis B surface antibody test (HBsAB). Both tests are required before registration as all healthcare personnel (which includes healthcare students) who have direct contact with blood or body fluids, or with patient tissue, are at risk of acquiring hepatitis B occupationally.

If the HBsAB tests do not show an acceptable level of immunity, the student must begin a second Hepatitis B vaccine series and repeat the HBsAB test. If the student

continues to be non-immune after a second series of Hepatitis B vaccine, they will be considered to be a “non-responder” and will be required to follow up and may have to complete additional vaccination according to the Ministry of Health guidelines.

## **HIV and Hepatitis C**

At present there are no vaccines that protect healthcare workers from hepatitis C virus and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Therefore, the policy for protecting students and patients from HIV continues to rely on good general infection control procedures.

In order to ensure personal and public safety, students are responsible to take the necessary steps to ensure that they do not put themselves at risk from infection by a blood borne virus in their private lives.

### **4.8. STUDENTS’ RESPONSIBILITIES**

- First “do no harm.”
- Learn and practice standard and additional infection control precautions. This applies to all patients regardless of their diagnoses.
- Ensure protection from infection through vaccination.
- Take measures to prevent transmission of acute infectious diseases to others.
- Know their infectious status for hepatitis B and hepatitis C. This involves testing before commencing studies and periodic testing, as long as the risk of exposure to these viruses (through occupation or other activities) continues.
- Seek immediate post-exposure follow-up if exposed to an infected patient’s blood.
- Report any patient exposure to your blood so that both you and the patient can be tested. The source of exposure will not be revealed to the patient.
- If implicated in patient infections students must undergo testing for blood borne pathogens as requested by the hospital where the implication took place.

### **4.9. CONFIDENTIALITY**

Student medical records, screening results, and vaccination records will be confidentially maintained for each student by the Student Health & Wellbeing Unit and according to Higher Education Council (HEC) regulations and in compliance with regulations relating to data protection.

## **5. SUMMARY OF PROCEDURES**

1. All RCSI Bahrain students must read and agree to abide by the terms and conditions of this policy. RCSI has an over-riding duty of care to the public with whom medical and nursing students are in close contact. RCSI Bahrain is obliged to ensure that reasonable and appropriate measures are taken to safeguard students, their colleagues, patients and members of the public. Safeguarding these groups is of paramount importance.

2. Prior to registration and joining the university, all new student applicants will undergo blood borne viruses screening.
3. Rescreening (repeat screening) will be required after registration and during the programme of study. Details of this are found in the **“Policy on General Health, Infectious Diseases Screening and Vaccination of RCSI Bahrain Students”** and the RCSI Bahrain **“Infectious Disease Screening and Immunization Report”**.. Rescreening will include testing for infectious diseases and a review of vaccination records. This is organized by the Student Health and Wellbeing Unit. It is the students responsibility to ensure that all required vaccines remain up to date.
4. Only students who have adequate antibody levels for hepatitis B and confirmation of being negative for hepatitis C, hepatitis B and HIV will be permitted to commence their clinical placements. In order to ensure both student and patient safety, students will not be allowed to be involved in EPPs until RCSI Bahrain has received satisfactory proof of hepatitis B immunity and that their infection status for hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV is clear.
5. If during repeat screening a student is found to be positive for a BBV, namely Hepatitis B and or HIV, the university has an obligation to disclose this information as per section 4.6.
6. Students who do not comply with screening and vaccination requirements are in breach of the Student Code of Conduct and their case will be referred through the University’s disciplinary process.

## **6. RELATED DOCUMENTS**

- Policy on General Health, Infectious Diseases Screening and Vaccination of RCSI Bahrain Students
- RCSI Dublin: Blood Borne Viruses Policy
- RCSI Bahrain Student Code of Conduct
- RCSI Bahrain Student Agreement
- Recommended Immunization Schedule for the Kingdom of Bahrain: Ministry of Health document
- Recommended Vaccination to Health Care Workers : Ministry of Health document
- RCSI Bahrain Infectious Disease Screening and Immunization Report

**RCSI Medical University of Bahrain**  
P.O. Box 15503  
Tel +973 17351450  
Fax +973 17330806  
Adliya - Kingdom of Bahrain  
Email: [communications@rcsi-mub.com](mailto:communications@rcsi-mub.com)  
[www.rcsibahrain.edu.bh](http://www.rcsibahrain.edu.bh)

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