

September 2014

Dear Student,

IMPORTANT HEALTH INFORMATION FOR NEW STUDENTS

This letter contains important information about your health and wellbeing, especially relating to meningococcal infection, measles, mumps, rubella, and influenza.

As a student you can be more vulnerable to these infections because you are moving into a new environment involving close social contact in halls of residence or communal housing, and in coming together from all over the world to live in one place you can be exposed to bacteria and viruses you have not come across before. The early symptoms of some of these infections can be mistaken for other illnesses so it is vital that you take preventative measures before you reach university, and when here, that you give attention and priority to your own health, and always inform others when you are unwell. Please keep this information safely so you can refer to it again.

Meningococcal Infection (Meningitis/Septicaemia)

This illness is extremely serious so you need to be aware of the signs and symptoms so that you can take immediate action.

In the UK, meningitis/septicaemia is usually caused by meningococcal bacterial strains B and C. The UK government has a programme to vaccinate against strain C and you may have been vaccinated at school or college before starting university. However, if you have not been vaccinated against it, then you are strongly advised to contact your General Practitioner (GP)/doctor to seek advice about immunisation as soon as possible **and before** commencing university as it takes about two weeks to become fully effective.

The symptoms of meningitis and meningococcal septicaemia are not always easy to spot because they are very similar to those of flu. Recognising the symptoms early enough could ultimately mean the difference between life and death, so always err on the side of caution. The illness can develop very quickly and sometimes people become seriously ill within a few hours. Possible symptoms are listed below but they may not all appear at the same time:

- Vomiting
- High temperature/fever
- Cold hands/feet
- Violent or severe headache
- Stiff neck
- A dislike of bright lights
- Drowsiness/difficult to wake
- Severe muscle pain
- Convulsions/seizures
- Confusion
- A rash - tiny spots or bruising under the skin, which does not fade when pressed under a glass.

If you think either you or a friend has meningitis contact your doctor or NHS 111 immediately. Explain why you are concerned and describe the symptoms carefully and ask for advice. Early treatment is essential. Be familiar with the symptoms. Look after your fellow students and tell somebody if you feel unwell.

If you have any questions about this, further advice can be obtained from:

The Meningitis Trust: www.meningitis-trust.org (download the app www.meningitisnow.org/index.php?CID=205 for symptoms) Tel: 0800 028 1828 (24 hour helpline)

University Health Centre: www.unimed.co.uk Tel: (01273) 249049;

Mumps, Measles and Rubella (MMR)

The Department of Health has recommended that young adults are fully immunised against Mumps, Measles and Rubella which are all highly infectious viral diseases. Two doses of the MMR vaccine are required to be properly immunised. You should check your vaccination history with your doctor **before arrival** and make sure that you have been vaccinated. Immunisation is available from the University Health Centre if you register with the practice and have been unable to be immunised before arrival.

Mumps can be unpleasant and serious complications occur in a small number of cases. Symptoms begin with a headache and fever for a day or two before the disease is characterised by swelling of the neck glands.

Measles causes a range of symptoms including fever, coughing and distinctive red-brown spots on the skin. Serious complications and even death can occur. There was a surge in the number of measles cases in England and Wales this year.

Rubella (German measles) causes a high temperature/fever and a distinctive red-pink rash. In most cases, rubella is a mild condition, but it can have serious consequences in pregnant women as it can harm the unborn baby.

Influenza (Flu)

Outbreaks of 'flu' occur regularly, tend to peak during the autumn and winter and can spread quickly in a campus community. If you have a sudden high fever (38 °C/100.4°F) and symptoms such as unusual tiredness, headache, runny nose, sore throat, cough, aching muscles, diarrhoea or vomiting, you may have flu. Contact your GP, the Health Centre on campus or NHS 111 for advice.

www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/AboutNHSservices/Emergencyandurgentcareservices/Pages/NHS-111.aspx

Ebola – current information (August 2014) from Public Health England

You may be aware of the media coverage of an outbreak of Ebola in West Africa. To reassure you:

- transmission of Ebola from person to person is by direct contact with the blood and body fluids of an ill person with the disease. The virus is not spread by the airborne route
- any persons arriving back in the UK having travelled from any of the affected countries, and who are free of symptoms, are **not infectious** and there should be **no restrictions** on their university attendance or normal activities

For further advice on symptoms/actions see www.gov.uk/government/publications/ebola-advice-and-risk-assessment-for-educational-childcare-and-young-persons-settings

Your Health action plan

- **Register with a doctor either before you arrive or soon after – do not wait to become unwell.** If you intend to register with the University Health Centre, you can either do so online before you arrive or you can pick up a form from them or from the Student Life Centre on campus. If not living on campus you should register with a GP local to where you will be living during term time, so please make this a priority when you arrive at Sussex. University Health Centre: www.unimed.co.uk Tel: (01273) 249049.
- **To find a local GP or Dentist** www.nhs.uk/Service-Search
- **Get the vaccinations you need before you arrive** (see above)
- **Find out about “walk in” and online health services** such as the Brighton Station Health Centre which are open at the weekend. www.brightonstationhealthcentre.co.uk
- **Bring with you some standard flu remedies**, such as Paracetamol and a thermometer. High temperature (above 38 C) is a key indicator for flu.
- **Get to know your flatmates** and agree to support each other if you are unwell, e.g. by collecting medications/general provisions for each other.

- **Look after yourself!** Getting run down makes you vulnerable to 'flu and other illnesses so take care of yourself by eating well, getting enough sleep and limit alcohol consumption. www.nhs.uk/livewell/studenthealth

For further health information see the Health and Wellbeing website www.sussex.ac.uk/wellbeing. We look forward to welcoming you to Sussex.

Yours sincerely

Amanda Griffiths
Manager, Student Wellbeing
healthandwellbeing@sussex.ac.uk