Changes to BCG programme

Please note that changes are being made to the UK BCG vaccination programme. The new programme will target those most at risk and will replace the current universal (schools) programme.

BCG vaccination was first introduced in the 1950s and recommended for secondary school children. The age at which the immunisation was recommended represented the most effective use of the vaccine for the epidemiology prevailing in the UK at that time (~50,000 cases per year).

In the 1960s neonates born to new entrants to the UK from countries of high prevalence were also targeted; this was due to concerns about the high rates of TB in these populations and the fact that children born into these communities were at higher risk of infection than the general population.

The epidemiology of TB in the UK has since changed from a disease of the general population to one of predominately high-risk groups. However, in Scotland only a quarter of TB cases are in people born outwith the UK compared to 60% in the UK overall. The highest rates of TB are in ethnic groups in the first few years after entering the country and rates remain high in the children of these immigrants wherever they're born. Other risk groups include contacts of cases, the homeless, alcohol abusers, and those with HIV infection.

The groups recommended for BCG vaccination are:

- All infants living in UK areas where incidence of TB is 40/100,000 or greater (no NHS Boards in Scotland fall into this category) (at-risk population)
- Infants whose parents or grandparents were born in a country* with a TB prevalence of 40/100,000 or greater (at-risk population)
  *see overview
- Previously unvaccinated new immigrants from countries with a high prevalence of TB (at-risk population)
- Children who would otherwise have been offered BCG through the schools' programme will now be assessed for TB risk-factors
- Contacts of cases known to be suffering from active pulmonary TB (contacts)
- Health care staff who may have had contact with infectious patients or their specimens. These comprise Doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, radiographers, OTs, technical staff in microbiology and pathology departments. It is particularly important to test and immunise staff working in maternity and paediatric departments, and departments in which the patients are likely to be immunocompromised e.g., transplant, oncology and HIV units (occupational)
- Veterinary and other staff who handle animal species known to be susceptible to TB e.g. simians (occupational)
- Staff of prisons, old people's homes, refugee hostels for the homeless (occupational)
- Those intending to stay in Asia, Africa, Central or South America for more than a month (travel-related)

New arrangements

At-risk population group

The Public Health Protection Unit (PHPU) remains responsible for providing BCG immunisation for all these groups although specific arrangements have not yet been finalised

Occupational group

Where there is an occupational service for the occupational risk-group then responsibility for immunisation will lie with that service. Where there is no service then responsibility will lie with the PHPU. Please note that only individuals in those groups listed opposite require BCG.

Contacts group

The PHPU remains responsible for BCG immunisation of contacts of active pulmonary TB.

Travel-related group

Where BCG is one of a multi-vaccine travel schedule as part of travel risk assessment, then the travel clinic at the Brownlee centre may provide the service.

Where BCG is the only vaccine or is part of a simple schedule then the PHPU will be responsible.
TB: high-rate countries

Below is a list of countries with high rates of TB. BCG is recommended for previously unvaccinated new immigrants from these countries and infants whose parents or grandparents were born in these countries.

Afghanistan  Ghana  Georgia
Albania  Guam
Algeria  Guatemala
American Samoa  Guinea
Angola  Guinea-Bissau
Argentina  Guyana
Armenia  Haiti
Azerbaijan  Honduras
Bahamas  India
Bahrain
Bangladesh  Indonesia
Belarus  Iraq
Belize  Japan
Benin  Kazakhstan
Bhutan  Kenya
Bolivia  Kiribati
Bosnia Herzegovina  Kuwait
Botswana  Kyrgyzstan
Brazil  Korea
Brunei Darussalam  Lao People's Democratic Republic
Burma (Myanmar)  Republic
Bulgaria  Latvia
Burkina Faso  Lesotho
Burundi  Liberia
Cambodia  Lithuania
Cameroon  Macedonia
Cape Verde  Madagascar
Central African Republic  Malawi
Chad  Malaysia
China  Mali
Colombia  Marshall Islands
Comoros  Mauritania
Congo  Mauritius
Congo Islands  Mexico
Côte d'Ivoire  Micronesia (Federated States of)
Croatia
Democratic People's Republic of Korea  Moldova
Democratic People's Republic of Congo  Mongolia
Djibouti  Morocco
Dominican Republic  Mozambique
Ecuador  Myanmar
El Salvador  Namibia
Equatorial Guinea  Nepal
Eritrea  New Caledonia
Estonia  Nicaragua
Ethiopia  Niger
Gabon  Nigeria
Gambia  Northern Mariana Islands

Important notes:

Immunisation staff are reminded that people seeking vaccination for themselves or their children should be assessed for specific risk factors for TB. Those without risk factors should not be offered BCG. Re-immunisation with BCG is not required. It is recommended to be given only once.

If you would like to comment on any aspect of this newsletter please contact Marie Laurie on 201 4933 or at marie.laurie@gghb.scot.nhs.uk