



# Clinical placements and Covid-19 – what you need to know

## Information for healthcare students – July 2020

### Have placement arrangements changed because of Covid-19?

During the peak of Covid-19 infection in the UK, special arrangements were made for healthcare students, which meant that they either opted-in to extended paid placements or temporarily moved into theory-only education. As the incidence of Covid-19 infection has fallen, arrangements for placements are being normalised so students will once again be expected to go out on standard ('supernumerary' in nursing) placements to progress through their education.

As Covid-19 still remains in circulation, some things about placements may be different in 2020/21. For example, there is likely to be extra emphasis on risk assessment of individual students, there will be greater use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and you might make greater use of simulation or technology. Placement experience may be undertaken in new environments, eg telehealth or as healthcare courses adopt new models of placement delivery.

### I am worried about Covid-19. Do I need to go out on clinical placement?

Practice placements are an essential part of healthcare courses. Students who wish to progress during the 2020/21 academic year will need to complete the placement requirements of their programme. It is understandable that some students are anxious about going out into placement because Covid-19 is still in circulation. However, it is important to bear in mind that evidence to date indicates most healthcare students are at low risk of experiencing severe symptoms. Placement providers risk assess all student placements and will provide appropriate PPE for students. Your university will also risk assess students individually. In some cases, different placement arrangements may be available for students in higher risk groups.

If you are worried about placements please speak to your university as soon as possible.

### I have been shielding and may be unable to go out on placement. What should I do?

If you have been advised to shield during the pandemic or live with someone who is in this position, a return to clinical placements may not be possible for the foreseeable future. Students in this position may need to defer entry to healthcare education or to step off their course until the rate of infection has fallen or until a vaccination is available. You should speak to your university about this as soon as possible.

## What will happen if Covid-19 infection rates go back up or if there is a local lockdown?

Local health and social care services may have to respond to future waves of Covid-19 infection and local scenario planning is happening now. It is conceivable that this could affect student placements but HEIs and placement providers aim to keep arrangements as normal as possible for students in any future waves.

Healthcare students are considered to be essential workers. This means that you should be able to access childcare for school age children during a lockdown and travel to your placement.

## How do I know my clinical placement will be safe?

Student safety is paramount for universities and placement providers. Placement providers carry out risk assessments for placements and your university will individually risk assess healthcare students before they commence placements. If you are in a higher-risk category, your university will take this into account.

Your university and your placement providers will ensure you are well prepared for your placement and you will be provided with appropriate PPE during your placement.

Naturally, while Covid-19 remains in general circulation, no placement can be entirely risk-free (and this was also true before the current pandemic). This is why the risk assessment process is important. It is important that you tell your university about any changes in your own circumstances which might increase your risk of severe Covid-19 symptoms, such as pregnancy.

## What arrangements will be in place if I become ill?

If you become ill during your placement you will be eligible for Covid-19 testing. You may in any case be given access to regular testing within your placement environment. You should follow workplace and national guidelines for reporting, isolation and contact tracing. You will continue to be advised and supported by your university.