

MEDICAL

FAQS REGARDING IMMUNIZATION AND HEALTH INSURANCE

MY HOWDY PORTAL SAYS I HAVE AN IMMUNIZATION DEFICIENCY HOLD. WILL THIS AFFECT MY REGISTRATION OR IMMIGRATION STATUS?

All newly admitted international students automatically have an immunization deficiency hold placed on their accounts. The hold is removed once the appropriate documentation and/or test results have been provided to SHS. The immunization deficiency hold will keep you from registering for classes but does not affect your Visa, immigration status, and admission to Texas A&M University.

WHAT IS THE UNIVERSITY POLICY ON TB SCREENING AND WHAT KIND OF REPORTS DO I NEED TO BRING?

According to the Texas A&M University policy, T-Spot or Quantiferon Gold Blood testing is required for all incoming, high-risk students, domestic or international, who have arrived from countries where TB is endemic. India is included in one of the countries where TB is considered endemic, and hence you must take the test. TB screening must be done within 12 months of enrollment. Even students with a prior BCG immunization require tuberculosis screening.

This information needs to be recorded on the University's Tuberculosis Screening Form. Following is the link to the same: <https://shs.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Tuberculosis-Screening-May-2022.pdf> It is to be filled by the in-house doctor/surgeon where you get the test done. In addition to the form, please bring the original test result document. Even though the test can be done here, it is pretty costly here compared to what it is in India.

WHAT IS THE UNIVERSITY POLICY ON BACTERIAL MENINGITIS VACCINATION? IS IT TRUE THAT ALL INCOMING STUDENTS MUST TAKE THE MENINGITIS VACCINE?

According to Texas Senate Bill 1107, effective January 1, 2012, all students entering an institution of higher education (public and private) are required to either provide evidence of vaccination against bacterial meningitis or a signed affidavit declining the vaccination. This requirement applies to all first-time or transfer students beginning January 2012.

However, students are exempt from the vaccination if any of the following apply:

- The student is 22 years of age or older (effective October 1, 2014)
- The student is only a distance learner (online)
- Medical reasons do not permit the student to take the vaccination (must be verified with a physician).
- Student declines the vaccine due to reasons of conscience, including a religious belief

If you intend not to take the BM vaccine, you will need to submit a signed affidavit stating that the student declines the vaccination for bacterial meningitis for reasons of conscience, including a religious belief. This conscientious exemption form from the Texas Department of State Health

Services must be requested here <https://corequest.dshs.texas.gov/>. The delivery of the affidavit might take several weeks, so act early.

If you anyways intend to take the vaccine against bacterial meningitis, you can ask the doctor to fill this form up: <https://admissions.tamu.edu/admissions-staging/files/9d/9de27ca7-04d4-4505-a19e-83225ad6cb48.pdf>

Vaccination must be received at least 10 days before the first day of the semester. The BM vaccine is also available at the TAMU student health center but is costlier compared to what it is in India. If you plan to live on campus, you will not receive a housing assignment until one of these two documents is received by the Department of Residence Life. Specific information on how to provide this documentation will be provided by the University after a student has been admitted and has applied for housing.

SHOULD I SEND THE IMMUNIZATION RECORD/TB TEST RESULTS TO A&M RIGHT AWAY?

You can send the results and forms to SHS by either fax or by email. Please fax the completed TB form(s) to Patient Services at (979) 458-8319 or email to patient-services@shs.tamu.edu and the Meningitis form should be sent to admissions@tamu.edu.

However, it is not compulsory to send these documents to the University right now. You can even do that after you arrive here. Just make sure that you fill in all the necessary information before you come here. After your check-in with the International Student Services (ISS), you will be asked to go to the Beutel Health Centre and get your medical block removed. Hand the Immunization record to the concerned individual at that time, and they will clear your block.

I HAVE RECEIVED A LETTER FROM TAMU REGARDING THE IMMUNIZATION RECORD. NOW THE QUESTION IS FROM WHOM SHOULD I GET THE FORM SIGNED AS YOU MAY HAVE DONE THAT?

The University used to send an Immunization Record form along with the admission offer mail during the previous years. We are not sure if this practice is still on. So, if you didn't get one, please don't freak out. And if you did get one, It is advisable to get it filled by your family doctor, if you have one. In case you don't have a family doctor, get it signed by a doctor from a good hospital (not any small clinic). In some cases, you probably won't remember all the dates of the various immunization shots (unless you have records of them). If this is the case, make sure that the dates are adjusted well. E.g.: the first set of immunization shots should be in the first 3 months of birth and so on.

I AM TAKING THE VACCINATION FOR HEPATITIS B FOR THE FIRST TIME. IT NEEDS THREE SHOTS TO BE TAKEN AND I MAY NOT BE ABLE TO TAKE ALL OF THEM BY THE TIME I COME THERE. CAN I CARRY A VACCINE VIAL WITH ME SO THAT I CAN REDUCE THE COST? WILL THEY PROVIDE ME JUST THE INJECTION IF I GIVE THEM THE VACCINE?

No. The Preventive Medicine unit at Beutel Health Centre (TAMU Student Health Services) has strict guidelines and hence they cannot give you an injection for a drug that you bring with you. They will inject you only with drugs that are available here. (The only exception to this rule is an allergy serum and that too with proper and valid documentation from a doctor in India). If you

are not able to take all the necessary doses before you come here, then the only option is to pay and get it done here. Please remember to bring proper documentation of the previous vaccination schedule as it will make it easier for them to administer the next shot.

MY DOCTOR SAID THAT INDIANS TAKE ONLY ONE MMR VACCINE (WHEN THEY ARE ABOUT A YEAR OLD) AND AMERICANS TAKE ANOTHER DOSE WHEN THEY ARE FIVE. SO WHAT DO I DO ALONGSIDE MMR#2 IN THE IMMUNIZATION RECORD? DO I LEAVE IT BLANK?

This is only if you are filling up the Immunization record form. You can leave the second one blank or you can write the date for MMR across the fields for both MMR#1 and #2.

WHAT KIND OF CHECKUP SHOULD I HAVE BEFORE I COME TO THE US?

Nothing is mandatory. But, if you want to, you can get a complete medical check-up done, especially dental and eye-checkup. These are very expensive in the US and it is best you do them in India.

If you use reading glasses, make sure you have at least 2 pairs of glasses, because if they happen to break, you'll pay a lot getting them fixed. (It costs around \$160 to get a spectacle made.)

DO I NEED TO BRING MY MEDICAL RECORDS WITH ME?

Yes, you should. You are going to be here for some time now, and if you have had a specific medical condition in the past, remember to bring the doctor's record sheets, prescriptions, etc. You don't need to bring a huge file for this. You know your health best. Get what you feel might be useful in case you have a medical condition once you come here.

DO I NEED TO TAKE ANY SORT OF HEALTH INSURANCE WHILE STAYING AT TAMU? DOES TAMU HAVE ANY STANDARD PLANS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS?

All international students must have medical health insurance and evacuation/repatriation coverage. International Student Services is responsible for monitoring the verification of international students' required health insurance. F-1 students are required to have medical health insurance and evacuation/repatriation coverage each semester they are registered. However, F-1 students and their dependents are strongly encouraged to maintain insurance coverage at all times (even not when registered). J-1 students and their dependents are also required to have medical health insurance and evacuation/repatriation at all times.

All international students are automatically enrolled in the System Student Health Insurance Plan (SSHIP) unless they apply for and are granted a waiver. According to the 2021-22 academic year plan, you might have to pay ~\$1000 for the fall semester and ~\$2000 for spring and summer semesters (you pay this together in Jan).

IS INSURANCE PURCHASED FROM INDIA, SAY FROM ICICI, ACCEPTED AT TAMU? THIS WORKS OUT TO BE PRETTY CHEAP. CAN I PURCHASE IT?

They have very strict criteria when it comes to accepting another insurance as an alternative. You can read more about that here: <https://iss.tamu.edu/Health-Insurance/Health-Insurance-Basics-%E2%80%93-A-M-Student-Health-Insur#0-WaiverCriteria>.

We strongly advise against getting external insurance to save money as health systems here are more complex and in times of emergency better help can be sought from the administration here if you have the insurance provided by TAMU.

I HAVE GOT ADMITTED WITH AN ASSISTANTSHIP AND MY OFFER LETTER SAYS I AM ELIGIBLE FOR HEALTH INSURANCE BENEFITS. DOES THIS MEAN I DON'T HAVE TO SIGN UP FOR ANY INSURANCE PLAN?

Some students employed through the TAMU system (GANT, GAR, GAT, and some fellowships) are eligible for health insurance benefits. (Please contact your employer department to verify if your position is benefits-eligible). Students who are benefits-eligible may choose a TAMU medical insurance policy within 60 days of their employment. Students who do not choose a plan with 60 days of employment will be automatically enrolled in the University's Care Plan. Please note that choosing this plan might mean that you will have a monthly premium that's deducted from your paycheck. All other plans will cost you more than that.

However, benefits-eligible students will be receiving a monthly employer contribution only on the first of the month after their 90th day of employment (according to Texas State Law). During these 90 days, all the students will be auto-billed \$1010 (or whatever it is at the time of enrollment) for a semester coverage of the A&M International Insurance Plan (irrespective of whether you have benefits or not). Only the students who enroll in the Grad Plan (University's Graduate Employee Insurance Plan) are eligible for partial reimbursement during the period of double insurance coverage through the Texas A&M University system provider AIP after 90 days. Please note that any time there is a break in employment, the monthly employer contribution will start only after 90 days of the employment.