



GET WITH THE PROGRAMME

Dr Chris King takes a more detailed look at the immunisation programme in the UK and what may be required if you work or live abroad.



With changes in the aviation industry pilots seem to be moving to all corners of the globe to pursue their flying careers. Considerable emphasis is put on flying training and integration into the various airlines, but I wonder how much thought is given to their domestic situation whilst living there, in terms of their health, medical cover and, in particular, their immunisation status?

With so many young pilots opting to train at academies such as CTC and Oxford, rather than go to university first, it is possible that they may not have completed their UK immunisation programme, let alone those required for countries abroad. And many of them may end up working overseas.

With this in mind, I thought it would be useful to run through the immunisation programme for the UK plus a brief review of the immunisations required abroad.

Immunisation in the UK

The UK immunisation programme protects against the following infections in childhood: diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), haemophilus influenzae (Hib), polio, meningococcal meningitis group C (MenC), measles, mumps, rubella and pneumococcus, as well as the human papillomavirus in girls.

This is achieved as follows:

- Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), polio and Hib (Dta/IPV/Hib) is given at two, three and four months of age.
- Pneumococcal vaccine (PCV) is given at two and four months of age.
- Meningitis C vaccine (MenC) is given at three and four months of age.
- Between 12 and 13 months measles mumps and rubella vaccine with a booster of Hib, meningitis and pneumococcal vaccine is given.
- Between 40 months and five years old a further diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis and polio is given together with a further measles mumps and rubella vaccine.
- Girls between the ages of 12 and 13 are given a human papillomavirus (HPV) injection to protect against cancer of the cervix in later life.
- A further tetanus, diphtheria and polio (Td/IPV) is given to 13-18 year olds.
- Five doses of diphtheria, tetanus and polio vaccine ensure long-term protection throughout adulthood. This seems to be the main group when there is some doubt about the need for further vaccinations. If you have not had the five immunisations in this group they simply need to be topped up at the relevant time.

It is important that all children are immunised even if they are older than the recommended ages in the programme. If any injection is missed or delayed, the schedule should be resumed and completed as soon as possible. There is no need to start any course over again.

All of these immunisations should be recorded at your GP surgery or by your health visitor or possibly accident and emergency departments. In

the light of the above information you should be able to ascertain whether or not your own immunisation schedule is complete. If not, only the missing immunisations need be given.

It is well worth having a list of all these immunisations with your licence or passport. It is possible that if other countries do not have this information, they might insist on them being repeated when there is no need.

Immunisations abroad

A brief résumé of immunisations for abroad is listed below. Do not forget to check whether or not malaria prophylaxis is required.

- Yellow fever vaccine is given as a single injection and is valid from 10 days and lasts 10 years. An international certificate of immunisation is required.
- Typhoid vaccine is given as a single injection and is effective after two or three weeks and lasts three years.
- Hepatitis A vaccine consists of two injections, 6-12 months apart and lasts 10 years and is effective immediately.
- Meningitis ACWY is a single injection and is repeated after three years if at risk. Please note that meningitis C vaccine given to a child as part of the UK immunisation programme does not cover other strains of meningitis found elsewhere in the world.
- Hepatitis B is a course of three injections, the second one being one month after the first and the third after six months. At-risk individuals should get a booster after five years.
- Cholera is no longer routinely given.
- In the UK the influenza injection is only given to those with existing medical problems or during epidemics. It is usually combined with the swine flu vaccination. ■

For more information about the immunisations you require visit your GP.

