

MMR versus TB ^[1]

Alice ?

Columbia requires an MMR immunization. Other schools I have attended also require a TB test. Why does CU require the MMR but not the TB test?

? Needles

Answer

Dear Needles,

You are right, Columbia University requires all students, regardless of the number of credit hours, to provide documentation of immunity to measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) prior to starting their first term of study. In fact, this requirement is a New York State law. The only exception to this requirement is if all of a student's classes are online. Although not as common as they once were (as a result of vaccinations), there are still outbreaks of these illnesses in the United States ? it is very important that all students be immunized. In contrast, tuberculosis (TB) is relatively rare in the United States. And according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) ^[2], in order for a person to actually become infected with TB, they would have to spend an extended amount of time in an enclosed environment with a person with an active case of the disease, a cough, and numerous tuberculosis organisms in their lung secretions. So, TB tests are not required for Columbia students on the Morningside campus; however, full-time, clinical and non-clinical students on the Medical Center campus ARE required to have a TB screening ^[3] within six months of the deadline date.

TB infection is most commonly transmitted through the air; there is little concern about casual contact, such as shared items or food. The only exception is unpasteurized milk or milk products ^[4] ? a concern usually associated with travel to other countries (though raw milk products can also be found in the U.S.). If, by the way, you are planning to travel outside the United States, a consultation with a provider at Travel Medicine (Morningside) ^[5] or Travel Services (CUMC) ^[6] can provide you with valuable information about the precautions you will need to take depending on your destination(s). The clinicians can also discuss and provide immunizations and other precautionary medical treatment as necessary.

There is a vaccine available for TB ^[7] called the Bacille Calmette-Guerin (BCG) vaccine. When used, it is primarily intended to reduce the risk of serious complications in infants and children as a result of TB infection. The CDC states that the BCG vaccine is not always effective at preventing TB in adults, and therefore it is not routinely recommended for them in the United

States.

Students who come from countries in which TB is prevalent should be screened for tuberculosis with a skin test before coming to the University. You may want to talk about this recommendation with your own health care provider prior to attending school.

To document your immunity to MMR, Morningside campus students can download the [MMR form from the Columbia Health website](#) [8] and take it to the Columbia Health Immunization Compliance Office. You can also go to the Immunization Compliance Office, located in Alfred Lerner Hall room 503 to pick up and fill out the form. Students who are unsure of their immunization status may have a blood test at [Medical Services \(Morningside\)](#) [9] or the [Student Health Service \(CUMC\)](#) [10] to test for immunity to these diseases.

Alice!

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Links

- [1] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/mmr-versus-tb>
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- [3] <http://www.cumc.columbia.edu/student/health/newstudent/prereg.html>
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- [5] <http://health.columbia.edu/services/pcms/travel-medicine>
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- [7] <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/tb/default.htm>
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