

Off to College--Parent's Medical Tool Kit

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Sending your child off to college is a complex process that involves a lot more than packing up supplies and setting up their dorm room. It is a time to help your child become more independent through your guidance. Set up your student for a healthy college career by preparing for their medical independence.

Please review your student's **college website for the health clinic resources** with your child. Some colleges offer Counseling services, medical urgent or routine care and some have fewer resources. It is easier for students to understand their resources before they are ill or have a health emergency. The first few months of college require a lot of adjustment. Discuss how your child can reach you for emergencies.

Be sure their medical needs are set up ahead of time. Work with their current doctor to verify all immunization and physical exam forms are up to date. Send the forms in by the deadline to avoid problems during move in. Obtain enough prescription medication for the first few months and have a plan for refills. Common prescriptions to plan for include birth control, ADD, depression or anxiety medications. Visit the eye doctor and have their eyeglasses updated and contact lenses available. Set up allergy shots ahead of time at the college health clinic if available or a local allergy doctor. Plan surgery or other medical procedures to take place during college breaks. If your child needs a specialist near the college, work with your current specialist to set this up. Call the college health clinic with your student to discuss any questions and to set up a medical record account. Don't assume anything is automatically arranged.

Please be aware that at age 18, parents do not have automatic access to their child's medical records or medical providers. **After age 18, consent is required to allow college health doctors to speak to parents about the student's care.** Even the health insurance subscriber does not have access to the student's health information. Permission must first be obtained from the student due to privacy laws. Many colleges have release of information forms to sign before providing parents any health information. Some will accept verbal permission from students. Review the college web site and have a conversation with your child. College students have a strong desire for privacy so sharing medical information is an important issue to discuss.

Have a conversation about this independence as some students avoid getting health care because of their fear that their parents will be able to obtain information about the student's office visits or tests. **Consider discussing your values around health** including sexual health, vaccinations and mental health. College students, while developing their own health beliefs, often strongly value their parents' beliefs.

Health insurance and medical costs are a big issue for college students. Please review your health plan before sending your student to college, especially out of state. Some health plans limit coverage to emergency care only when outside of the home state. Be aware that out of network visits can be costly. Do not assume coverage without verifying your plan directly with your insurer about the location your student will be living 9 months of the year. Because students move around so much, it can be tricky to find the best health insurance. Many colleges offer student health plans that are of good quality but costly. These are designed to cover the students needs on campus and at the local hospitals. It is dangerous to assume your student will not need regular health care during their college years. Also find out what mental health services are covered with your plan as this coverage can be very important for students. Dental costs are often not covered under medical insurance. Be honest with your students about the cost of care (deductibles, co-insurance) as students are very concerned about expenses and are at risk for not seeking needed care due to cost.

Having a child moving away to college is a big change for parents. **Be sure to take care of yourself and ask for help if you are feeling down or depressed.** You can discuss this adjustment with your doctor or a therapist.

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