

Staying healthy at college

Part of the transition to college includes students taking over management of their own health care. To be sure they know the steps to take, share the following health care to-do list from adolescent medicine specialist Dr. Richard Brookman. These steps can help simplify the process and ensure good health when away from home.

Before you go – forms and the pre-college health visit

Once you accept an offer of admission, you'll be receiving electronically or by mail much information and many forms to be completed. This will include information about health requirements and forms for documentation of health status, including immunizations, medications and allergies. Each college has its own unique forms and specific requirements. You may need some help from your health care provider and current school to gather everything that is needed.

- Schedule a visit with your primary health care provider.
- Bring the college health forms you receive in the mail or download them from the college's website. Complete your portion of the forms before your health visit.
- Bring a copy of your immunization records - you can obtain a copy from your high school as your primary care provider may not have all of your immunization records on file.
- Bring a list of all medications you take and determine what prescription refills or new prescriptions you will need before you leave for college.

On your way – what you should take with you

- Your health history including a list of medications you take and your known allergies
- Health insurance cards and related information (you may be covered under your parent's plan or you may purchase the college's plan)
- List of emergency contacts and how to reach them
- Supply for at least 30 days of all medications/pills you take every day
Have a plan to get refills – either sent from home or obtained at a pharmacy near your college
- Supply of non-prescription medications you're likely to use (ibuprofen, vitamins, etc.)
- Names and contact information for your primary care provider, dentist and any other specialists who continue to provide care
- Emergency plan for any complications if you have a chronic condition such as diabetes, asthma, seizures or depression

Once you are there – what you should locate

- The student health center - know their hours and what services are available
- The student counseling center - know their hours and what services are available
- The nearest pharmacy you're likely to use – it's helpful to find out if there's a 24-hour pharmacy nearby
- The nearest urgent care facility or hospital in case you need emergency care
- Local specialists you may need to see, such as an endocrinologist or psychiatrist
- A secure place and method for storing your medications

Special focus – chronic health problems

There are challenges for students with chronic health problems when they go to college away from home. It's important to discuss and have a plan for the following before you go:

- The need to navigate new and unfamiliar health systems
- The absence of parents available to make appointments, interpret your symptoms or help manage your medications
- Possible changes in your daily routines which may complicate medication and treatment schedules. For example, class schedules may be different on different days of the week.
- The possibility that academic, recreational and/or social opportunities might conflict with medical appointments and the importance of giving priority to medical care to ensure continued good health.

Other important conversations

Prospective college students and their parents should review and discuss information about staying safe and healthy away from home including topics such as sleep hygiene, alcohol and other substance use, good decision-making regarding relationships and sexual activity, and maintaining mental health.

