



DEDICATED TO THE
HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN

THE OFFICIAL NEWSMAGAZINE OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

AAP News

Volume 30 • Number 7
July 2009
www.aapnews.org

COLLEGE PARENT PLUS

INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

College 101: Take care of yourself

Health issues are not a priority for most high school grads readying for their college debut in the fall. But if you are a parent of an incoming freshman, you can help your son or daughter make a healthy transition to college.

Start by scheduling an exam with the pediatrician or other primary care physician, who can ensure that all immunizations and medical forms are up-to-date. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends college students be vaccinated against meningitis and other diseases.

Consult the college or its student health center Web site for details on what medical information and vaccines are required for your child. Gather information on school health services and fees, plus student health insurance offerings. Some students, including those with special needs or chronic conditions, might wish to schedule an appointment with a clinician at the school health service after arriving on campus.

Be sure your child understands his or her health insurance coverage and carries a copy of the insurance ID card.

"This is one of the biggest problems we have," said Jean H. Hanson, R.N., M.P.H., who directs administrative services for Duke University Student Health. "Kids come in here and have no idea whether they have insurance."

Packing a first aid kit with bandages, antibiotic ointment, a thermometer and over-the-counter pain medication also is helpful.

Parents should discuss how kids plan to handle refills for prescription medications or medical supplies. Should the parents send the items? Can students refill via e-mail or the student health service? Some students are inclined to stop taking their medications, but this should only be done under a professional's care.

Encourage your son or daughter to seek medical care on campus when needed. That includes going to coun-



seling if he or she is feeling stressed or anxious. Discuss the importance of self-care (such as nutrition, sleep and exercise) and making healthy decisions about issues such as alcohol and sex.

"One huge message I would like parents and pediatricians to give," said Hanson: "Be true to yourself. Take care of yourself. Don't get caught up (in unsafe behavior)."

Sooner or later, kids will call home with an illness, but parents shouldn't diagnose over the phone. Comfort the student, Hanson said, but send him or her to student health. "Mom can't see the sore throat over the telephone."

Overall, she said, "allow the child to go and grow."

—Alyson Sulaski Wyckoff

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