

Preparing Teens for Life Beyond High School – A Review of Student Health Issues

Dear Parent/Student:

A vast number of opportunities and challenges await a young adult beyond high school. Here is a rundown of many important health related issues to consider while preparing for your future.

Decision Making

Most students welcome the greater freedom to make decisions concerning future careers, friends, and lifestyles. For the most part, students do well academically and/or career wise and are able to stay well physically and mentally. However, some students, faced with difficult decisions, falter and engage in risky behaviors, which may be unhealthy and even dangerous. Parents can influence the decisions their children make by engaging in ongoing discussions of difficult topics such as underage drinking, drug use, sexual encounters, and violence to name a few. Young people need to be informed that they will be held accountable as adults for the decisions they make. Parents can be a valuable resource to young adults who may have difficulty making informed choices.

A Physical Examination

Oftentimes, teens are considered to be “healthy” young adults. However, this is an excellent time to consider scheduling a full health assessment for your young adult. In fact, many colleges require this as part of the enrollment process. The exam should include a review of health history and immunizations, a discussion of health risk issues such as smoking, sexual history, mental health concerns, drug use, eating disorders, and any chronic health issues the student presently has or may be at risk for due to family history. A vision screening and dental screening would also be very beneficial. Students need to become knowledgeable about factors that affect their overall health. Ultimately, they will be making their own healthcare decisions as adults. A student at college and/or a young adult newly independent needs to know what medications he/she uses, any allergies to medications or otherwise he/she may have, and what type of insurance, if any, he/she is covered by. Some independent young adults may not have access to health insurance. If possible, it would be prudent to take care of health issues now prior to facing the possibility of having no health or dental insurance or lack of access to services for health needs.

Immunizations

As children get older, the protection provided by some early childhood vaccines can wear off. Teen years also mean a risk for more diseases, for this reason, teens also need to receive additional vaccines. *Don't assume that your student received all recommended vaccines in the past. Talk to your health care provider about your child's current health and need for vaccines.*

Immunizations

Routine: All adults should update this routine immunization every 10 years:

- **Td**– Tetanus Diphtheria OR
- **Tdap** – Tetanus, Diphtheria & Pertussis (or whooping cough) – in 2004 there were more than 25,000 cases of pertussis in the U.S. More than 8,000 of these cases were among adolescents and more than 7,000 were among adults. Up to 2 in 100 adolescents and 5 in 100 adults with pertussis are hospitalized or have complications. Pertussis causes severe coughing spells, vomiting, and disturbed sleep.

Adolescents 11 -18 years old should get one booster dose of **Tdap**

Adults 19-64 years old should substitute **Tdap** for one booster dose of **Td**

Required: Many colleges and certain occupations mandate that students/employees receive or have proof of vaccinations against certain diseases. Some examples: may be:

- **Td or Tdap** (Must have received within the last 10 years).
- **MMR** (Measles, Mumps, and Rubella) – Colleges now require documentation of at least two doses.
- **VARICELLA** (Chickenpox) – Some employers require documentation of this disease, proof of immunity by laboratory blood test, or proof of vaccination. For those receiving the vaccination at 13 years of age or older, 2 doses are required at least one month apart.
- **MENINGOCOCCAL** – Most colleges require this vaccination prior to admittance especially for those students who plan to reside in dormitories.
- **HEPATITIS B** – This is a 3 part series required for those who may work in an environment where there may be occupational exposure to blood and body fluids or waste materials. Health care workers and those who work in detention centers or long term care facilities may be required to receive this vaccine.

Be sure to check the requirements for your particular college and/or occupation of interest.

Some countries also require proof of immunization for international travel. Some examples may be:

- **MENINGOCOCCAL**– The newer vaccine licensed in 2005, Menactra protects for 7-10 years
- **YELLOW FEVER** – One dose protects for 10 years

Recommended: Depending on your career path, lifestyle, health history, and geographic location or travel itinerary, your health care professional may recommend one or more of the following immunizations:

- **HPV** (Human papillomavirus vaccine). This 3 dose series guards against certain forms of cervical cancer and other diseases caused by HPV. In June 2006, ACIP (Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices) recommended the HPV vaccine series for females, ages 9–26. Most infections don't cause any symptoms and go away on their own, but HPV can cause cervical cancer, the 2nd leading cause of cancer deaths among women around the world
- **HEPATITIS A** (2 doses)
- **HEPATITIS B** (3 doses)
- **POLIO** – An adult booster is advisable for travel to certain areas of the world.
- **INFLUENZA** – One dose annually
- **VARICELLA** (Chickenpox) – Two doses for adolescents and adults with no history of disease.
- **PNEUMOCOCCAL**
- **MENINGOCOCCAL** – this vaccine can prevent 4 types of meningococcal disease, including 2 of the 3 types most common in the U.S. and a type that causes epidemics in Africa.
- **TYPHOID** – 1 dose is effective for 2-3 years.

Always keep a copy of your immunizations. Accepting responsibility for making ongoing decisions in life includes making appropriate and informed healthcare decisions. A periodic review of immunizations is necessary for all adults to insure protection against diseases to which you may be exposed.

Basic First Aid

Believe it or not, many young adults do not have the knowledge or equipment to handle minor medical problems. A young adult newly independent may not have a thermometer, bandages, tweezers, antiseptics, over the counter medications, heating pads, chemical cold packs, etc. It would be helpful to address basic health supplies and health concerns prior to having your student become ill or injured while away from home.

Conclusion

Life beyond high school is full of many possibilities. With adequate planning and effective communication between parents and their young adults, students can be assisted toward optimal health – emotionally, spiritually, physically, and socially.

