

August 1, 2001

PATIENT POWERline from the desk of Marie Savard, M.D.

RE: Pack This Medical Advice With Your Child To College

Dear Friend,

An 18-year-old college freshman telephoned my radio show last year inquiring about the meningitis vaccine. He had heard that a former high-school mate had died from complications of meningitis at college. He wondered whether the vaccine was right for him. I was impressed that teenagers today are taking health matters into their own hands. How much better it would have been for both teenagers to have been prepared before leaving home for the first time. Many of us are about to send our sons or daughters away from home and our watchful eye (often for the first time) this fall. There are some important questions that need to be asked.

- Are they up to date on all their medical needs/appointments? · Do they need any last-minute immunizations or shots?
- Do they have their medical history with them?
- Do they KNOW and UNDERSTAND their own medical history?

Whether your child is leaving home for school, for a new job or to get married, their medical information must go with them. You can no longer watch over their health as you have done since they were babies. When they get sick, they will be seeing a new doctor, often in a student health setting, without your advice and support. Eighty percent of what a doctor relies on to make an accurate diagnosis comes from their medical history. Here are some tips that will help you prepare your child for leaving home and teach your child to take charge of her or his own health. No one else can do that for them.

1. Make sure their immunizations are up to date. Most kids by now have received the basic set of immunizations. Check with your child's doctor about tetanus (it must be given every 10 years) and the hepatitis B series. (Not mandatory yet, but the full series of three for teenagers is a great idea before they become sexually active). College freshmen are at increased risk for meningitis because of the close living quarters. I gave the vaccine to all three of my sons as they went off to college. And it saves you the worry later if there is a meningitis scare. Get a copy of all immunizations for your child's own health record.
2. Schedule medical appointments: eye, skin exams if they are on acne medicine and any doctor visits they may need if they have asthma, diabetes or other chronic health problems. A general last checkup with their family doctor is a good idea as well. Girls should have an appointment with a gynecologist or family doctor to discuss everything from their periods to birth control.
3. Ask the doctors for a copy of vital health information such as shot records, test results, doctor consultations from specialists and hospital discharge summaries.
4. Organize and store all your child's medical information in a binder or folder  
[http://www.dr.savard.com/system\\_record.htm](http://www.dr.savard.com/system_record.htm). Discuss with your child their complete medical history and review their medical records and any medications with them. Send them off with all their health information and health needs in tow. I also recommend carrying a wallet card summarizing this information. (You can download the Health-At-A-Glance form from my site at [http://www.dr.savard.com/system\\_record\\_excerpt1.htm](http://www.dr.savard.com/system_record_excerpt1.htm). Help them fill out the information in advance, asking their doctor if you have any questions you can't answer)
5. Teach your child to take charge of his/her own health: to ask questions, have confidence in their own instincts, to continue to collect their medical test results and reports and take them to each doctor visit, and to be knowledgeable about their medical conditions and needs. (My sons knew to call 911 when their brother was injured and ask the ER

for a copy of the medical report. When my sister's son was hospitalized while at college, he knew to get a copy of the discharge summary, so vital to his family doctor at home.) Be sure to pass this information on to your child. Giving him/her all the information they need to take charge of their own health is a great and everlasting gift.

To learn more about how to get involved more fully in your own health care please visit my web site at <http://www.DrSavard.com>. Please feel free to share this message with your friends and family. I would also welcome your stories and questions, <http://www.info@DrSavard.com>.

Warm regards,

Marie Savard, M.D.

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