

# AU InforMed

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## Back to School Edition



### Key Inforbits

- How to: avoid getting sick
- Vaccinations and Preventable Diseases
- Best Practices – Surviving College
- Requesting Medical Records
- Counseling Services

## How to: Avoid getting sick

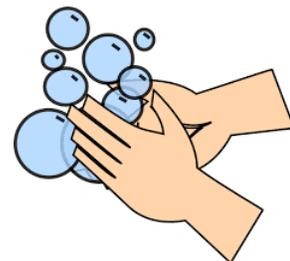
Getting sick during the semester can have an expected negative effect on performance in school and an unexpected effect on final grades. Avoid getting sick by remembering this simple, common habit:

### Wash your hands, wash your hands, wash your hands!

A study conducted in Spain, published in the American Journal of School Health, found a statistically significant decrease in missed days of school due to upper respiratory infection (i.e. coughs and colds) when children washed their hands with standard soap and water, followed by alcohol-based hand sanitizers (Group Experimental), compared to standard hand washing with soap and water alone (Group Control). Absenteeism in the group that used both hand-washing with soap and water and hand sanitizer was reduced by 38%, and a decrease in absenteeism of 0.45 episodes per child per academic schoolyear.

Hand washing remains one of the most tried and true methods of preventing the spread of illness, especially when it comes to colds and flu. Adding hand sanitizer to the mix, particularly during those winter months when cold and flu are at their peak, appears to be beneficial at preventing unwanted illness and the resulting missed days of class, exams, and other learning activities.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that communities that have been properly educated on handwashing have experienced reduced frequencies of diarrheal and upper respiratory illnesses, such as colds. Incidence of respiratory illness can be reduced in the general population by 16-21%, and incidence of diarrhea can be reduced by 31%.<sup>2</sup>



# Vaccinations

## And Preventable Diseases

There is no better way to delay productivity and fall behind in class than by getting sick. Here we review some preventable diseases, their causes and symptoms, and the appropriate prevention.

### Influenza (flu)<sup>3</sup>

- The flu is a *viral* infection that is spread from person to person by sneezing, coughing, and talking, or by touching items/surfaces that have been sneezed or coughed on by an infected person.
- Symptoms occur suddenly and include **chills, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body and muscle aches, headaches, fatigue**, and sometimes **fever**.
- Prevent contracting the flu by getting the annual flu shot, avoiding those who are sick, covering coughs and sneezes with the elbow, and frequent appropriate handwashing. If you have the flu, stay home!

### Meningitis (meningococcal)<sup>8,9,10</sup>

- Meningitis is a serious *bacterial* infection that is spread from person to person through saliva by coughing, kissing, or sharing cups or utensils. Meningitis may also spread quickly in shared spaces, such as dormitories.
- Up to 10-15% of young adults who contract meningitis die, sometimes within hours, and 10-20% of survivors will have residual disabilities.<sup>10</sup>
- Symptoms of meningitis include sudden onset of **fever, headache, and stiff neck**. Persons infected may also experience **nausea/vomiting, sensitivity to light**, as well as **confusion**.
- While meningitis may be treated with antibiotics, it is preventable with vaccination of MenACWY. Young adults, especially *first-year college students living in the dorms*, should receive vaccination if they missed receiving it at or after 16 years of age.<sup>8,9,10</sup>



### Human Papillomavirus (HPV)<sup>7</sup>

- HPV is a *viral* infection that is spread from person to person by skin-to-skin sexual contact, including vaginal, oral, and anal sex.
- HPV may be fought off by the body's immune system, but if it is not, then HPV can cause **genital warts** as well as **many types of cancer** affecting the mouth/throat, cervix, vagina, vulva, penis, or anus.
- Prevent contracting or spreading HPV viruses by getting the HPV vaccine if you did not start or complete the HPV series as a pre-teen or teenager. It is not recommended to receive vaccination after 26 years of age.

### Tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis (Tdap)

- Tetanus is a *bacterial* infection that is contracted via open wounds (think stepping on a nail or getting cut by unearthened glass).
- Symptoms of tetanus infection include **jaw cramping, muscle spasms, painful muscle stiffness, headache, fever, sweating**, and a **racing heartbeat**.
- Diphtheria is a *bacterial* infection that is spread from person to person by coughing or sneezing, or by touching surfaces that has the diphtheria bacteria on it.
- Symptoms of diphtheria include **weakness, sore throat, fever**, and extremely **swollen** glands in the neck, **difficulty breathing or swallowing**.
- Pertussis (aka. Whooping cough) is a highly contagious *bacterial* infection that is spread from person to person by coughing, sneezing, or simply sharing breathing space.
- Symptoms of pertussis worsen gradually, beginning with a **cough** and **mild fever** but escalating to many **severe, violent coughing fits** that leave the person **winded, exhausted**, and may induce **vomiting**.
- Pertussis may be deadly in children under the age of 1 year, so it is best to be vaccinated prior to being around infants.
- Prevent contracting tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis by getting one adult dose of Tdap vaccine (age 19+).<sup>4,5,6</sup>

# Best Practices

## Surviving College

You are finally here, at campus, ready for an exciting adventure away from home and everything you are used to, and eager to start your campus

life! But along with feeling independent and free you may find yourself feeling “blue” and “not-so-confident” at times. Here, we provide a short list of what you might be encountering, along with the ways to improve your experience:



*mentalhealthamerica.net*

- **Great expectations:** Everyone feels they can conquer the world when starting college. However, new friends, new curriculum, new living arrangements may all prove overwhelming. Some students feel sadness, loneliness, and disappointment if things are not going as planned. These feelings are normal when going through a major transition and should subside after a few months of school. Try to be involved with study groups and social, academic, or religious organizations in areas that interest you. Keep in touch with family and friends for support!
- **Roommates:** After a period of excitement about a new roommate, “turf wars” may arise. It is wise to discuss reasonable expectations and boundaries at the forefront, then follow through on those. Mutual respect is key!
- **Drinking:** It may affect your safety and academic performance. If you don’t want to participate, say so. Your friends and colleagues should understand and respect your wishes. If you are of legal age and decide to drink alcohol, then stay safe by pacing yourself, knowing your limits, and staying with friends; drink responsibly! Don’t drink and drive! Know transportation alternatives.
- **Eating habits:** It is tempting to choose fast-food out of convenience and proximity to campus; however soon it may translate into pounds gained. Prepare healthy alternatives and plan your meals ahead of time, so you still have convenient options.
- **Money:** Some students find themselves spending impulsively, then scrounging at the end of the month for gas money. Know your budget, establish spending limits, take advantage of student discounts, purchase food in bulk, and eat at home often. If you would like to work, your campus career center is a helpful place to begin looking for a part-time job. Avoid building up credit card debt and remember to pay them off in full every month – or avoid credit cards altogether.
- **Homesickness:** Every student will experience “homesickness” sooner or later, regardless of the distance. College is an enormous transition, and it is natural to miss what you are accustomed to. Make sure to keep connected to your family and friends via phone calls, social media, and other communication apps. Also, get involved with campus friends and student organizations to keep busy and take your mind off home. Accessing the AU Involve website would be a great place to start to find things to do. A vast amount of information including student organizations/clubs and upcoming campus events are found there. A few organizations/activities to consider at Auburn University are Student Government Association, Alpha Epsilon Delta, and intramural sports.<sup>14</sup>
- **Sleep:** There are so many new activities and social interactions, it is easy to start cutting down on sleep. Sleep is essential for your body and overall academic performance. The National Sleep Foundation recommends 7 to 9 hours of sleep for young adults age 18 – 25; however, if that’s unattainable, get at least 6 hours. Listen to your body and take a nap on the weekend or in the afternoon, if needed, to catch up on missed hours of sleep.<sup>15</sup>

- **Schoolwork:** Finding ways to manage your school workload can be the hardest aspect of college life. Unfortunately, if you fail to gain control, grave consequences could result. Listed below are a few recommendations to help you to get a grip on things.
  - **Get organized:** Buying a planner from a local bookstore or online can help get things organized and eliminate missed assignments, exams, or events. Prefer technology? Many apps are available on your preferred app marketplace to fit your needs.
  - **Set goals:** Each day set new goals and strive to achieve them. When setting goals, make sure they are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely or SMART!
  - **Study, study, study!:** There is no easy way! It is a must in order to be successful in your college courses. A general rule of thumb for studying is to study 2 hours per week for each credit taken (example: 15 credits hours = 30 hours of study time per week).
  - **Do not procrastinate:** Prioritize your assignments due on Friday over hanging out with your best friend. You can reward yourself with fun once your assignments are completed. You will be able to enjoy your social time without the pressure of an assignment hanging over your head, and you will be rewarding yourself for a job well done with something you enjoy!
  - **Get help:** Many professors have office hours for you to utilize and ask questions about any course material. Use these resources! If you are stuck, contact or start a study group from your class and work together. Get acquainted with the academic support services on campus, if necessary, for tutoring from students who have passed the classes with flying colors. It is up to you to pass your courses, so remember to ask for help!<sup>16,17,18,19</sup>

## Medical Records

### *An overview of transferring your most important and protected information*



[www.ahima.org](http://www.ahima.org)

Requesting medical records may seem complicated but, a successful transfer is manageable. Sometimes they opt for not transferring and may find themselves at a disadvantage when unexpected testing and treatments come about. These can be both time- and money-consuming. It is important that the new provider has comprehensive information about the student's health, allergies, and medical history. The request process is similar throughout the country and complies with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), a law that addresses the accessibility, privacy, and security of your health information. The steps to complete a transfer of medical records are, usually, as follows:

1. Contact your previous provider's office and ask to complete a *Patient Access Request* or *Medical Record Release Authorization* form, or a similar form.
2. Know and specify which records are needed. Sometimes you may be able to choose the format of documents: paper, electronic, USB, CD, etc.
3. You may also request your own copy of your records to be released to you.
4. Transferring medical records may take time; more than within a few days. HIPAA allows 30 days for a transfer and an additional 30-day extension with explanation of cause for delay.
5. Facilities have a right to charge a fee for processing, handling, and mailing your record – another reason to be selective in what records to request. Fees and terms may vary from provider to provider, so remember to ask about them up front. The provider is required to inform patients about approximate costs of record files beforehand.

6. Once records are ready, they are transferred directly to the new provider, or you receive notification that they are available for pick-up.<sup>11</sup>

## Counseling Services

### *Know your resources*

Counselors can prove to be the most valuable resource for students of any age – from grade school students to graduate students. Oftentimes, their role is mistakenly perceived as focused on scheduling, placement, or addressing “inadequate” students; however, this is very far from the breadth and scope counselors are licensed to address. They are well-trained in all aspects of student life, and their goal is to work with students to address any concerns or questions that may arise, not “tell them” what to do or penalize them. School counselors may help students to find their optimal point of well-being, based on goals and abilities, and to regain confidence in daily academic and personal life. Additionally, school counselors strictly adhere to rules of privacy and nondisclosure.

Counselors offer individual and group sessions, and their services are mostly free for the students. If the scope of the problem is beyond the expertise or timeframe of a counselor, they can refer a student to an appropriate provider, who can offer additional help for more specific needs.<sup>12,13</sup>

In conclusion,

*“You have brains in your head.  
You have feet in your shoes.  
You can steer yourself in any direction you  
choose.  
You’re on your own.  
And you know what you know.  
You are the guy who’ll decide where to go.”*  
— Dr. Seuss



[www.usnews.com](http://www.usnews.com)

If at any point you feel that you need help, just ask for it! Resources are available to you so that you can be at your healthiest.

Auburn University Student Counseling and Psychological Services (SCPS) may be found at <http://wp.auburn.edu/scs/>



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*“Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement.”*

– Helen Keller [1880 – 1968, American author, political activist, and lecturer

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