

AAP News College Parent Plus

INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Talk with students about alcohol, sex before they go to college

Heading off to college means a first taste of freedom for young adults. With it comes big decisions about alcohol and sex.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that all college-bound freshmen receive a preventive health examination and recommended vaccines. This visit offers an opportunity to talk with your pediatrician about the effects of alcohol and drugs on decisions about safe, consensual sex.

About 1,825 college students die each year from alcohol-related accidents. In addition, binge drinking — consuming more than four alcoholic drinks in a row for females and more than five for males — affects college students' grades.

Sexual abuse also is more likely when drinking, making it important for students to be aware of the risks of unprotected sex.

According to the AAP, sexuality education helps prevent and reduce teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. This knowledge can help students make positive and safe choices about healthy relationships, responsible sexual activity and reproductive health. The AAP urges parents to have a two-way conversation about sex with their teenagers. If parents are comfortable

talking about sexual health, teenagers are more likely to seek reproductive health services, such as birth control.

Sexually active teens should use birth control methods that protect against pregnancy and diseases spread by bacteria and viruses. The first choice the AAP recommends for females who have sex is a long-acting reversible contraceptive device (e.g., intrauterine device or IUD) or under-skin implant. This type of birth control can prevent pregnancy for three to 10 years, but should be used with a condom. The AAP offers more information about teens' use of birth control at <http://bit.ly/29nVog0>.

Your student may need a few booster shots before heading to college, including meningococcal, pertussis, influenza and human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccines. The HPV vaccine has been available for over a decade and protects against certain cancers. It is recommended for both males and females.

Make sure your student knows where to seek medical care on campus. Many colleges have a health center that can provide routine checkups and prescribe necessary medications.

To find more health tips for college students, visit the AAP Healthy Children website at <http://bit.ly/29Sx0tD>.

— Trisha Koriath