

Tufts University Health Services looks more like a home than a clinic, with its wide front porch, cozy waiting room with both a TV and a plasma TV screen that rotates campus information every few seconds. Still, there is no mistaking the seriousness of its mission: providing accessible and high quality health care for a diverse student population. Patients who come in with a fever are asked to don a mask and are ushered into a separate triage area, hand sanitizers are never more than a few feet away, and there are fourteen exam rooms that can readily accommodate patients with appointments as well as walk-ins.

Margaret Higham, MD, Medical Director of Tufts University Health Services, sat down recently with the Parents Program to answer some questions.

Q: Are parents ever notified if their child is sick?

A: We notify parents when there is a life threatening illness or concern, which fortunately, happens only rarely. With that said, if a student asks us to call in less serious situations, we are happy to do so. If a student is being sent to the hospital, we will ask if we can call their parents, and most students are receptive to this. If a student has a more significant illness, such as mono, but isn't sick enough to need to go to the hospital, I will also often ask if the student would like me to call their parents, particularly if they are first year students.

Q: How many health care providers are there?

A: There are four doctors including myself, although we do not all see patients full time. For instance, I see patients half-time. There are also five nurse practitioners and physician assistants, all of whom are very skilled and work with consultation as needed.

Q: Where does my child go if he or she needs medication?

A: Health Services has an arrangement with a nearby pharmacy who will deliver prescriptions twice a day to the clinic, and students can come back to Health Service to pick them up. In addition, there are several pharmacies about a mile from campus in Davis Square.

Q: Does Health Services work like a walk-in clinic?

A: There are walk-in appointments for ill visits. But Health Services also offers scheduled appointments for a wide range of issues, including pap smears, contraceptive counseling, and women's health issues. Our staff has done a lot of training and we have the competency to help all students, including bisexual, gay, and transgender students.

Q: What happens if my child gets sick when Health Services is closed?

A: During the academic year, Health Services is open Monday-Thursday, 8 a.m.-7 p.m., Friday, 8 a.m.-6 p.m. and Saturday, 10:30 a.m.-5 p.m. We are also open holidays when school is in session. We are open more limited hours during winter, spring, and summer breaks. If your child gets sick when we're not open, he or she does the same thing if he or she were at home—either wait until we're open, or if very ill, go to an emergency room. TEMS, Tufts Emergency Medical Services, staffed by EMT-trained students, is available 24-hours a day, 7 days a week for medical emergencies.

Q: Is Health Services equipped if flu breaks out?

A: Health Service treats students with the regular seasonal winter flu every year. This year, we are also expecting the new H1N1 influenza to have a big impact. I don't think anyone knows exactly how that will affect college campuses, but we are working to develop the best contingency plans possible. We are working with the University's Pandemic Flu Task Force to provide appropriate supplies and good health messages. We do not have an infirmary on campus, nor do we have an "isolation ward." When students are ill with something contagious, we ask them not to attend classes and to stay away from others as much as possible. We talk to students about the possibility of going home to recover or staying with a friend or relative who lives nearby. I recommend that families think carefully about what their son or daughter would do if they got flu or mono, or some other illness that would make them sick for more than a few days. Mononucleosis is very common, as it is in all college settings. It is not particularly contagious, but it can cause students to miss a week or more of classes. Finally, I strongly recommend that Students come to college supplied with a thermometer, hand sanitizers, sunscreen, and ibuprofen or acetaminophen.

Q: What if my child is coming to school with a significant illness?

A: We are happy to work with families to develop treatment plans and identify appropriate community resources for students with significant chronic illness: for example colitis, diabetes, eating disorders etc. Often, the student's treating physician will know a specialist in the area to whom they refer, but we can also identify local specialists. Treatment plans should be set up before arriving on campus

Q: Does the mandatory student health fee cover visits?

A: Yes, the mandatory comprehensive student health fee covers students for:

- Unlimited primary care and walk-in visits to the Health Service
- Access to the Counseling Center
- The first three psychiatric visits
- Allergy injections (excluding serum)
- An annual flu shot, while supplies last

Students with any type of insurance may use Health Services. Massachusetts law requires that all students carry comprehensive medical insurance. Health insurance is needed to pay for the following:

- Lab tests - both at Health Service and other labs
- Immunizations
- Visits to specialists - both at Health Service and in private offices
- Prescriptions
- Emergency Room visits
- Medical equipment - such as orthopedic supplies
- Private mental health visits