



SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING
Medical Director
Health Service

April 2018

Dear Parents and Families,

I hope this finds you enjoying the first few weeks of spring. Here at Tufts, we're getting ready for [Spring Fling Weekend](#), preparing for final exams, and making plans for Commencement on May 20th. It's hard to believe we're already so close to the end of the 2018-19 academic year! As the Medical Director for Tufts' [Health Service](#), it's my job to support students' health and, in turn, their overall Tufts experience. To that end, I'm writing with a few quick tips and pieces of information to help your student enjoy a strong finish this spring and have a healthy start next fall.

It's a fact of life – we all get sick, even healthy young college students. In fact, one of the lessons that students need to learn when they transition to a more independent life at college is how to manage their health – and how to manage their academic and co-curricular lives while they're sick. Before leaving home, students often have parents to tell them when to stay home from school and when they're well enough to go to class. In college, students need to learn to make their own judgments, and they also need to learn how to communicate with faculty about their health needs. Fortunately, at Tufts we have several systems in place to help students with this process, both for short- and long-term illnesses.

There is no hard-and-fast rule for when a student should miss class because of a short-term illness. In general, however, students with colds are expected to attend class, while students with fevers or more serious illnesses are not. In most situations, students who are too sick to go to class or complete an academic assignment should communicate directly with their faculty using Tufts' [Short-Term Illness Notification Form](#), which can be found online in [SIS](#) (our Student Information System). Students should submit the form as soon as possible, and then they should follow up directly with their faculty about any missed work. It's that's simple.

When students are suffering from a short-term illness the day of an in-class mid-term or final exam, they need to use a slightly different process to verify their condition and communicate with faculty. They first need to come to Health Service so that a Health Center clinician can perform an evaluation and provide them with a [Medical Documentation of Illness form](#). They then need to notify their instructor via email that they'll be missing their mid-term or final exam and provide them with a copy of the Medical Documentation of Illness form the next time they're in class. The student needs to be seen at Health Service prior to the exam, needs to be demonstrably ill, and also needs to notify their professor of their condition prior to the exam. Retroactive documentation is not accepted. But if a student follows the necessary steps in advance, their professor can make alternate arrangements.

Occasionally, students have illnesses that take them out of class for more than a week or two. When students have longer-term illnesses like mono or a concussion, they should first come to Health Service. After being seen, the Health Center treating clinician will ask them for permission to communicate with their Advising Dean ([Liberal Arts BA/BS](#), [Liberal Arts BFA](#), or [Engineering](#)). Their Advising Dean will, in turn, email the student's professors asking for flexibility and consideration. In many such situations, students can make up missed work. It's important to know, however, that for some classes, the actual in-class time *is* the work – for instance, dance or language classes, or small discussion seminars. Sometimes that work just can't be fully made up. In that case, an Advising Dean will work with the faculty member and the student to identify the best options for moving forward. Sometimes that means taking an Incomplete and finishing coursework the following semester, or switching to pass/fail instead of a letter grade. Sometimes that means withdrawing from a course. Regardless of the path forward, staff in [Health Service](#), [Academic Advising](#), and the [Dean of Student Affairs Office](#) are all here to support students as they consider their options and take the steps necessary to manage their health.

In addition to helping students manage a long-term illness when it occurs, the University also helps students and their families plan ahead by providing an important and underutilized resource in the form of optional

[Tuition Insurance](#). Signing up for Tuition Insurance means reimbursement for lost tuition if a student develops a serious medical or mental health condition during the course of a semester. This happens more often than you might think: a concussion, car or bike accident, the onset of a serious mental health condition, a cancer diagnosis, need for emergency surgery – all these things can precipitate an unexpected leave from school. That’s why I always recommend Tuition Insurance to students and their families. It’s an inexpensive protection for one of the most important financial investments you’ll ever make.

One last recommendation for your student’s first aid kit: I strongly advise that every student bring an inexpensive digital thermometer with them to school, along with a fever/pain reliever such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin) and a copy of their insurance card. Students often have trouble figuring out just how sick they really are, and knowing if they have a fever can be very helpful. (Remember, if you have a fever, it’s probably best to miss class.) A fever/pain reliever is also useful in many health situations, from headaches, to sprained ankles, to the flu, and much more. The insurance card is needed for lab testing, prescriptions, and specialist appointments. If you send your student to college with three health-related items next fall, make them a digital thermometer, a bottle of Tylenol, and an insurance card. (And tell them they can call you if they aren’t feeling well. We all want to call our parents when we’re sick – even after we’ve graduated from college!)

Getting sick is a normal part of life, which means it’s a normal part of any student’s college experience. Remember that Health Service is there to help, and remind your student that we’re here too. We’re dedicated to supporting the health of all Tufts students so they can accomplish their educational goals. Please make sure your student knows that they can come see us any time they think we might be of assistance.

Good health to you and your family this spring,

Margaret Higham
Medical Director, Health Service