

COLLEGE STUDENTS SHOULD HIT THE BOOKS ON INSURANCE

As students head off to college in the fall, the Maryland Insurance Administration strongly urges young adults – and their parents – to get smart about insurance. Children living away from home might not be covered by their parents' property, auto and health insurance. It is recommended that parents carefully review their homeowners, auto and health insurance policies to determine exactly what is – and what is not – covered for their college-bound children.

Whether your student lives in college housing or an apartment, they will likely have valuables such as a computer, TV, stereo and video game systems that could be stolen, damaged or destroyed in a covered loss. Parents should check their homeowners policy to see whether it will cover a student's possessions while away from home. Furthermore, if your student will be living in an off-campus apartment, parents should consider purchasing renter's insurance. This will provide coverage not only for your student's possessions, but also for additional living expenses if their apartment is uninhabitable. Further, under a renter's insurance policy, the liability coverage kicks in if there is damage to the apartment for which the insured is determined to be negligent.

Parents should also do some homework regarding auto insurance. If your child attends school away from home but will still use the family car when home on breaks, be sure to have them listed as a driver on your auto policy. Many companies offer a discount if your student is attending school over a certain distance and will not have regular access to the family vehicle. Also, if your student will be keeping a car on campus, it is important that you notify your insurance company of this information. In addition, the insurance company should be notified if your student achieves good grades as that accomplishment might earn a discount and lower your premiums.

Your child may be covered under your health insurance policy until the age of 26. However, while away at college, it is important to check whether the campus health clinic, local physicians and hospitals accept the family health insurance policy. For example, a student insured through an HMO may be outside the HMO service area of physicians and hospitals. If this occurs, the student will likely have coverage for emergency care, but not for other, routine care. Similarly, an insurer may pay benefits at out-of-network levels for students who are out outside a PPO network. Be certain the student has a copy of the insurance cards and knows how to obtain any required approvals before seeking treatment.

Students who don't have health insurance through a parent's health insurance policy, or who have limited coverage due to network service areas, should buy a student health plan. Student health plans are underwritten by an insurer that has

contracted with a college to offer coverage to its students. Review this plan carefully to make certain you fully understand what it covers.

It is important to review your policies to learn exactly what is covered and speak with your insurance advisor, producer or company regarding any questions you may have. You can also contact the Maryland Insurance Administration at 410-468-2000, 1-800-492-6116 or www.mdinsurance.state.md.us for further assistance.

Therese Goldsmith is the Commissioner of the Maryland Insurance Administration.