

Information You Should Know Regarding Your Health Care Treatment as a Minor

A minor is an individual who is under the age of 18. An “authorized representative” can consent for the treatment of a minor. The authorized representative is usually the minor’s parent or guardian, but can be a family member over the age of 18. An “emancipated minor” is an individual who has been determined by a judge to be released from parental control.

When a parent or authorized representative is unavailable:

If treatment is needed, and the minor’s parent or authorized representative is not present, the doctor or person who is providing the services will try to contact the parent or authorized representative.

A minor can receive medical, dental, and health services without the consent of a parent or authorized representative, when, in the doctor’s judgment, waiting for consent would result in delay of treatment which would increase the risk of harm to a person’s life or health.

Verbal Consent:

If the parent or authorized representative is not present but is available by phone, a verbal consent for treatment can be obtained. The doctor will explain the situation and the treatment recommended, and will document the verbal consent in the medical record. A member of the clinical team will also listen to the verbal consent and indicate in the medical record that he/she witnessed this consent. The date and time, and the name and relationship of the person giving the verbal consent will be noted in the medical record.

Consenting for treatment:

Minors are able to consent to their own medical, dental and health care services, with the exception of abortion, if the individual has:

- a. Graduated from high school
- b. Been married
- c. Been pregnant

An emancipated minor is able consent to all medical, dental, and other healthcare services, including abortion.

The doctor will write a note in the medical record that explains the reason why the individual under the age of 18 has the ability to consent.

Health care services for minors that don’t require the consent of a parent or authorized representative:

- Any minor may consent for medical and health services to determine if they are pregnant, have a venereal disease, or have any other disease that is reportable under the Pennsylvania Disease

Prevention and Control Law, including HIV and sexually transmitted diseases. A minor can consent to treatment for these conditions.

- Any minor who needs help due to the use of a controlled or harmful substance may consent for medical care or counseling related to diagnosis or treatment.
- Mental Health Services:
 - Any minor, who is fourteen (14) years of age or over, who believes that he or she needs mental health/psychiatric treatment in a facility that can provide these services, can request and receive an examination and treatment without the consent of a parent or authorized representative. If the minor is between the ages of 14 and 17, and is admitted to a facility for care, the parent or authorized representative must be told of this treatment.
 - Any minor who is fourteen (14) years of age or over may consent to outpatient (without admission to a facility or hospital) mental health/psychiatric examination and treatments without notifying the parent or authorized representative.

Confidentiality:

Usually the right to consent entitles a person to confidentiality. Under the circumstances that a minor has the right to consent, a doctor generally may not disclose the minor's health care information to anyone, including the minor's parents or authorized representative, unless the minor allows it.

However, the law permits and actually requires the disclosure of a minor's health care information, without getting the permission of the minor, under the following circumstances:

1. The parent or authorized representative is notified when a minor between the ages of 14 and 17 admits him/or herself to a facility for mental health treatment.
2. If the minor's parent or authorized representative consents to the admission to a facility for mental health treatment, the parent or authorized representative can authorize the release of past medical records to the minor's current mental health provider and in some cases, to the minor's primary care provider, sharing the information to try to provide the most comprehensive care.
3. If a minor is treated for injuries that are the result of a crime, including a sex crime, the doctor or staff member must report those injuries to the police.
4. Any person who provides health care to a minor must report if they suspect that a minor is being abused in any way.

Our Chaperone Policy:

1. Chaperones are recommended when the examination requires inspection or palpation of anorectal or genital areas and/or the female breast.
2. Patients are also able to request a chaperone during any physical examination. This should be communicated to the patient via notices in the room or during a conversation initiated by the Medical Assistant or provider.

3. A health professional should serve as the chaperone. Family members or friends should not be used as chaperones unless specifically requested by the patient and, if at all possible, only in the presence of an additional chaperone. The name of the chaperone should be documented in the medical record.
4. The patient's preference should be given the highest priority when deciding on the use of a chaperone. If the patient declines the use of a chaperone, the provider should document this fact in the medical record.

Please ask your health care provider or the office staff if you have any questions about this information.