

Confidentiality (health privacy) for youth and teens

Are you concerned about who will be told when you visit your doctor or nurse?

By law, all health professionals have to keep your health information confidential. They do not have the right to discuss your appointments with your parents, family or friends. This is true even if your family sees the same general practice or clinic, or the same doctor. Nobody at the clinic is even allowed to mention that you have been to see them.



Most health professionals would like you to talk about your health with your family but they also understand that sometimes young people want private treatment.

The **only** time a health professional can break this law and tell your family is if they are concerned that you or someone else is in danger of serious harm. Examples of this are if they feel you are at risk of suicide or causing harm to yourself or someone else, or if they thought you were being harmed or were at risk of being harmed by someone else.

Under these circumstances, the health professional would decide if anyone else needed to be involved, and if so, whom. They should talk to you first, let you know that they are going to talk to your parents/caregivers, and tell you why.

Government departments like police, Corrections and CYF can ask if you have been to see your doctor. Your doctor has to get your permission before telling them, and only has to say if you have attended or not. They don't have to give any details about why you visited or what you discussed.

Once you turn 16, you can consent to all your own medical and dental care. This means you can choose to have or not have any medical treatment.

If you are under 16 years old, you can still consent to your own medical treatment. But to agree to this, the health professional must believe you fully understand what the treatment involves and agree to it (this is called informed consent). So for example, if you saw a GP for contraception they would not have to tell anyone.

What about sex and confidentiality?

If you or the person you are having sex with is aged under 16, it is illegal to have sex. So the doctor or nurse could let someone know – but only if they thought you were at risk of serious harm. Being at risk of serious harm does not include you having consensual sex (sex you agree to) with someone your own age.

You can read more about sexual consent and the law on Sex'n'respect (www.sexnrespect.co.nz/Sex-'n'-Respect/What-is-consent/).



What about sexual assault?

If you have been sexually assaulted, it's a really good idea to go to a specialist doctor as soon as possible – even if you don't want to go to the police or tell your family. If you live in Canterbury or on the West Coast, you can see the doctors and nurses at the Cambridge Clinic – they specialise in looking after people who have been sexually assaulted.

Talking to a specialist doctor at the Cambridge Clinic is all confidential and can be very important for evidence later if you do change your mind about going to the police. If you are under 16, they'll advise you to see a GP, the police, or Child Youth and Family first.

What about abortion?

A girl of any age can consent to have an abortion.

If you are under 16, your parents or guardians can ask to see your medical notes, but the doctor or nurse does not have to share your information with them if you don't want them to.

Your health professional has your privacy as their number one priority. If you need to talk confidentially to someone about difficult things, health professionals are good people to talk to.

Written by HealthInfo clinical advisers. March 2016.