

# Minors' Access to Reproductive Health Care in Georgia

## A Minor:

A minor is a person under the age of 18.

## Informed Consent:

A minor who understands the risks, benefits and proposed alternatives to certain health services outlined in this card may give informed consent. Informed consent must be voluntary, may be verbal or written, and should be noted in the patient record.



## Confidentiality:

Fear of disclosure prevents some minors from seeking services. When young people are assured that providers will respect their right to confidentiality they are more likely to seek care, especially reproductive health care.

## Communication is Critical:

It is usually helpful for a young person to talk with a parent or a supportive adult when making health care decisions. In fact, most young people do involve at least one parent when making health care decisions. Whenever possible, open communication with a parent or guardian should be encouraged.

Open communication with parents is not always possible for young people. Some cannot involve their parents because they come from homes where physical violence, sexual abuse, or emotional abuse are prevalent. For these and other reasons, young people may receive a broad range of health services, including confidential reproductive health care as outlined in this card, without telling their parents or needing their permission.

## Facilitating Communication

- Initiate conversations with adolescents about their right to confidential health care.
- Discuss if and how a minor's parents will be involved in her/his care.
- Establish a trusting relationship with the patient and the parent: Discuss confidentiality with each individually.
- Encourage the adolescent to involve a parent whenever possible.
- Be sensitive to minors who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning, as these minors are at a higher risk than other adolescents.

## A minor may consent to confidential health services to prevent pregnancy, including:

- **Contraceptive Care and Counseling**
- **Emergency Contraception (EC)**

Emergency Contraception (also known as the morning-after pill) is a form of contraception. Clinicians have begun offering EC up to 120 hours following unprotected intercourse; however, **women are urged to take EC as soon as possible to maximize efficacy.** The National EC Hotline (1-888-NOT-2-LATE or [www.not-2-late.com](http://www.not-2-late.com)) offers information on EC options and providers. For further information about obtaining EC in Georgia, contact Planned Parenthood of Georgia's EC Connection at 1-800-327-4557 or [www.ppga.org](http://www.ppga.org). Minors do not need parental consent to obtain EC, and confidential services may be provided.

## Pregnancy, Prenatal Care, and Childbirth

A minor may consent to all health care services related to pregnancy, including pregnancy tests, options counseling, and labor and delivery services, without notifying a parent (unless she chooses to do so). A minor parent may consent to all medical care for the child.

**A provider is not required to disclose medical records or other information regarding health care services related to family planning, pregnancy, and childbirth to parents without the patient's consent.**

## **Abortion**

According to Georgia law, physicians shall not perform an abortion on an unemancipated minor without the written consent of the minor and either a signed statement by a parent or guardian that he or she has been notified, or advance notice to the parent in writing, by telephone or in person. If the parents or guardian cannot be located or if the minor refuses to notify her parents, she may then seek an order from the court (an option known as "judicial bypass") for a waiver of this requirement. The requirement does not apply when a medical emergency requires an immediate abortion. Note: A married minor under the age of 18 is considered "emancipated" and may consent to an abortion without any parental notification.

## **Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) Care**

Any minor may consent to testing and treatment for an STD without a parent or guardian's consent. Some STDs must be reported to the Department of Health.

## **HIV/AIDS Testing and Treatment**

The Georgia Department of Human Resources states that all county health departments offer HIV counseling and testing, both confidentially (names are recorded so health departments can contact infected persons to offer treatment and help with notifying sex or needle sharing partners) and anonymously (no identification is collected).

## **Substance Abuse**

A minor may consent to medical services and counseling related to substance abuse. Parental consent is not required for outpatient treatment.

## **Emergency Care**

In cases of emergency, consent to medical care is implied. "Emergency" means a situation in which the proposed surgical or medical treatment is reasonably necessary (according to competent medical judgment), a person authorized to consent is not readily available, and any delay in treatment would jeopardize the minor's life or health.

## Improving Adolescents' Access to Reproductive Health Care

1. Know the laws surrounding minors' access to confidential care. Help young people to understand their rights and options.
2. Become aware of clinics and/or programs in your area that offer confidential reproductive health care to minors if you or your facility does not do so.
3. Take steps to prevent the inadvertent disclosure of confidential information, including:
  - Ask patients for alternative contact information (where they can be reached if they do not want to be contacted at home).
  - Discuss billing and alternative forms of payment with the minor patient (i.e., cash is the most confidential/safest payment method).
  - Seek further counsel if you are uncertain about the requirements regarding the disclosure of medical records.

**Please Note:** This publication is intended as a guide, and does not provide individual legal assistance. Please check with your legal counsel for site-specific clarification about confidentiality and disclosure issues, including any new policies related to the HIPAA privacy rule.

### Developed by:

The Georgia Campaign for  
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*Physicians for Reproductive Choice and Health*<sup>®</sup> (PRCH)

Morehouse School of Medicine,  
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Georgia Chapter of the Society  
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