

Consent and Confidentiality of Services for Adolescents

CONSENT TO SERVICES

All 50 states and the District of Columbia allow teens under 18 years of age to consent to their own health services for STDs. However, in some states a teen has to be at least a specified age, generally between 12 to 14 years, to begin to consent for STD services.¹³ No state requires that healthcare providers get parental consent for services but some allow physicians to do so. A listing of state policies is available at www.prevent.org/ChlamydiaScreening, **Resource 21**.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF SERVICES

Medical information of a minor who has consented to STD services is protected by a variety of federal and state laws. Some states allow physicians some discretion to notify parents. In all states, minors may give their own consent and receive confidential services through programs funded by the federal Title X Family

Planning Program or Medicaid. If you cannot guarantee your teen patient confidentiality, you can recommend that she visit the local family planning clinic. A common barrier to maintaining confidentiality of STD services arises from billing practices. Commercial health plans usually provide an explanation of benefits (EOB) to the primary policy holder each time services are rendered. The EOB includes the patient's name, type of services, and the provider. Another barrier is routine office billing practices that may automatically add a copayment to a family's bill. Either billing practice can alert parents to what would otherwise be confidential services. There are several options for helping teens receive confidential services:

- ▶ A medical practice can offer teens the option of paying for services out-of-pocket, perhaps at a reduced rate, and

not billing the family's insurance company. Make sure this is allowable within the terms of your agreement with insurers.

- ▶ The provider can notify the insurance company that the services provided are confidential and not to be disclosed. A sample letter to insurance companies is available at www.prevent.org/ChlamydiaScreening, **Resource 22**.
- ▶ In some states, the provider can inform the patient that she can request the EOB and laboratory bills be sent to a different address.
- ▶ A practice may refer adolescents for confidential services at federally funded Title X Family Planning Programs, which offer STD screening and treatment and other health services. Listings of local clinics that provide free or low-cost, confidential STD screening and treatment services can be located at www.prevent.org/ChlamydiaScreening, **Resource 23**.