

Consent and confidentiality

Information for students about the Doctors in Secondary Schools program

One of the key objectives of the Doctors in Secondary Schools (DiSS) program is to make going to see the doctor easier for young people.

Young people want and need our privacy at times. Sometimes young people might want to make an appointment with the GP at the school on their own, without parents or carers knowing.

In most circumstances, you can. There is no law in Victoria that says you must be a certain age before you can visit a GP on your own.

When you make an appointment with the GP at your school, they will first need to determine whether you are mature enough to understand any medical advice or information they may give you during the appointment, before providing you with treatment.

The GP will discuss with you why you're there and decide whether you are able to consent to treatment yourself or if your parents or carers need to be involved. Sometimes the GP will want to talk to your parents or carers so they can better understand what is going on in your life and how they can help. However, the GP will talk with you first if this is necessary.

Consenting to medical treatment

There is no fixed age at which you can consent to medical treatment on your own. It always depends on what kind of medical treatment you need, and whether your GP thinks you fully understand what is involved. When your GP decides whether to give you medical treatment, they will consider:

- your age and maturity
- your independence – whether you live at home with a parent or carer, or support yourself
- the seriousness of the treatment
- whether you understand why the treatment is needed, what it involves, and things that might go wrong (like side effects from medication, or other complications).

If the GP believes you are mature enough to see them alone and that you understand the advantages and risks of the treatment, you can give consent to the treatment.

However, the GP may decide that you do not have the necessary maturity to see them alone and that you are unable to make your own decisions about the health issue you are seeing them about.

When this happens, the GP will talk about this with you first before talking with your parents or carers about continuing with your treatment.

Telling parents or carers

If the GP decides you are mature enough to see them alone, make your own decisions and consent to any treatment, they are not allowed to tell your parents or carers that you saw them without your consent. This is called confidentiality.

They are also not allowed to say anything about your medical appointment, even if your parents or carers ask for information.

However, if you are under 14 years of age and listed on your parents' Medicare card or have a duplicate Medicare card, your parents will be able to access some information about your appointments. For example, they will be able to find out the date of your appointments and the GP's name.

Depending on your school, if you make an appointment to see the GP during class time, the absence may be marked in the student management system as 'Attending a Health and Wellbeing Appointment' or similar.

If you are concerned about your appointment being kept confidential, you should talk to the GP about this at the start of the consultation.

Also in some cases, your GP might be worried about your health and safety, or that of others.

They may be required to tell your parents, carers or another person if:

- you intend to harm yourself
- you intend to harm someone else
- someone is harming you.

However, the GP will talk with you first if they do need to tell anyone.

Medicare card

Usually, you are listed on your parents' Medicare card.

If you are 15 years or older, you can get your own Medicare card by applying to Medicare Australia. The GP or staff from your school's wellbeing team can support you to do this.

For more information

[Doctors in secondary schools | Victorian Government \(www.vic.gov.au\)](https://www.vic.gov.au)

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