



Confidentiality

Confidentiality is one of the main concerns that young people all over the world have when they go to see a doctor or health professional. In fact young people often say it is the main reason they won't go to seek help with a health problem. This can be especially true for personal issues such as sexual health.

That's why it might be helpful to know that doctors and health professionals are legally bound to keep patient or client confidentiality. It is actually against the law for a doctor to share information about a young person without their permission. There are some important exceptions to this rule. First is if the doctor or health professional is concerned that a young person is at risk of suicide or serious self-harm. Second is if the concern is about the young person seriously harming, or killing, another person. The third important reason is if the young person is under 16 years of age and the doctor or health professional is concerned that they are being abused. This could include physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect. All these exceptions would lead the doctor or health professional to take any necessary steps to keep the young person (or someone else) safe. The young person would usually know that the doctor is involving others or notifying authorities because he or she would probably tell them.

When it comes to sexual health, doctors and health professionals are interested in providing young people with information and assistance with contraception, testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy testing. They often try to discuss other important issues such as relationships with partners, friends and families. All of this information is treated confidentially. Some young people worry that if they are having sex and they are under the legal age of consent then doctors and health professionals will tell their parents, or other authorities. However, as long as the doctor or health professional feels that the young person is not being abused and is having a sexual relationship that is consensual, they do not have to report it.

There is heaps more information about confidentiality at Confidentiality Fact Sheet
<http://www.reachout.com.au/default.asp?ti=824>

When it comes to testing for Chlamydia, it's important to know that a positive result must, by law, be notified to the relevant state or territory health department. This is for the purposes of collecting statistics, to allow us to know whether the rates are going up or down or staying the same. The health department that collects these statistics does not tell your parents, families or partners.