

I'm under 18. When can I get health care without an adult's consent?

❖ You can find the fact sheets we link to here at WashingtonLawHelp.org.

Introduction

Should I read this?

Yes, you should read this if you live in Washington State, you are under age 18, and you need to get health care without letting the adult in your life know about it.

I don't live with my parents and/or they aren't involved in my life at all. Should I still read this?

Yes. Under state law, doctors or other medical providers **might** have to get consent from the adult in your life who is authorized to make those decisions.

What will I learn?

You will learn:

- Who the “**authorized adult**” in your life might be.
- What medical care you can get without an authorized adult's consent.
- If you need to be at least a certain age to get different types of medical care without that adult's consent.
- What kind of medical care you might be able to get if you are homeless and not with an adult.
- Where you can get more help.



Defining “Authorized Adult”

What is an authorized adult?

When you are under age 18, an authorized adult is someone at least age 18 who has the legal power (the *authority*) to agree (to *consent*) to health care for you. This person may be:

- Your parent
- An adult who has court permission, like a court order, to make health care decisions for you (legal guardian or custodian, out-of-home placement order)
- An adult relative who has your parent's written permission to make health care decisions for you
- An adult relative responsible for your health care
- In some situations, a school nurse, school counselor, or homeless student liaison could be an authorized adult for you

I live with my adult sibling or adult cousin who doesn't have legal custody of me. Is this person an authorized adult for me?

Yes, they could be. Many relative caregivers of children and youth under age 18 do not have a court order or power of attorney. However, they can still consent to health care for you.

You can read the state law about this at [RCW 7.70.065\(2\)](#). We've attached a copy of the law below. You can bring it to an appointment with your health care provider.

My parents are dead or have been absent from my life for years. I live with an adult friend or neighbor. Does it make a difference?

It depends. The adult you are living with might have court permission or written authorization. If they don't, they might be able to get it. Read [I am age 12 – 17. What are my rights in a minor guardianship case?](#) and [Power of Attorney \(POA\) for Parents](#) to learn more about what options you might have.

In other situations, a school nurse, school counselor, or homeless student liaison might agree to be an authorized adult for you.

Medical Eligibility and Services Available

What if I have to go to the hospital emergency room?

You can get emergency health care at any age without the consent of an authorized adult. [RCW 7.70.050\(4\)](#).

What if I need to get an abortion?

You can get abortion services at any age without the consent of an authorized adult. [RCW 9.02.100\(2\)](#).

Can I get vaccinated against COVID without my parents knowing?

Yes, if any of these is true for you:

- In certain situations, where a school nurse, school counselor, or homeless student liaison consents for you.
- You are emancipated. Read [Emancipation of Minors in Washington State](#) to learn more about emancipation and the process to get emancipated.
- You are married to an adult.
- The health care provider determines you are a [mature minor](#). The King County Department of Health website at bit.ly/3Bho2OX has a good explanation of the Mature Minor Rule. **Whether you meet the requirements to be considered a Mature Minor depends on the facts of your personal situation and what a health care provider thinks about these facts.**

Can I get treatment for alcohol or drug use without telling my family?

Yes, if you are at least 13 years old. This is true for both outpatient care (where you do not stay overnight) and inpatient care (where you have to stay at the place where you are getting the treatment). If you go into inpatient treatment, the provider might have to let an authorized adult know.



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- ❖ You can read the state law at [RCW 71.34.530](#) for outpatient substance-use treatment and at [RCW 71.34.500](#) for inpatient.
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What if I need help with mental health issues?

You can ask for and get mental health care on your own if you are at least 13 years old. This is true for both outpatient care (where you do not stay overnight) and inpatient care (where you have to stay at the place where you are getting the treatment). If you go into inpatient mental health care, the provider probably has to let an authorized adult know.

Can I talk with someone about my gender identity?

Consultations related to gender identity can be considered mental health care.

Depending on your relationship with your provider, you should be able to get mental health care for this reason without an authorized adult if you are at least 13 years old. You can read the law at [RCW 71.34.530](#) for outpatient mental health care and [RCW 71.34.500\(1\)](#) for inpatient mental health care.

Can I get tested and treated for sexually transmitted infections (STI's) without my parents knowing?

Yes, if you are at least 14 years old.

I'm going to have a baby. Can I get prenatal care?

Yes. You can get prenatal care at any age without the consent of an authorized adult.

I am sexually active. Can I get birth control?

Yes. You can get birth control at any age without an authorized adult.

Can I get gender care?

Maybe. Depending on your provider, birth control (see above) **might also include the puberty blockers and hormone treatment** that are part of gender care.

What if I want to get medical care not listed above?

You might want to think about becoming emancipated, or filing a Mature Minor court petition. Both of these have downsides. Talk to a lawyer.



Homeless Youth

I am homeless and on my own. What health care can I get?

You can ask a school nurse, school counselor, or homeless student liaison might agree to be an authorized adult for you. If asking one of these adults is not an option for you, you can still consent to some non-emergency, basic health care for yourself. This includes:

- physical exams
- eye exams and eyeglasses
- dental exams
- hearing exams and hearing aids
- vaccinations
- treatment for illness and conditions
- routine follow-up care in an outpatient setting

Can I get gender affirming care while I am staying at a shelter or a host home?

Maybe. Normally a youth homeless shelter or a host home must notify your parents within 72 hours of your arrival that you are there. Starting July 23, 2023, if you are getting gender care, the shelter or home will contact the state child welfare agency instead of your parents. The state will then contact your parents about the possibility of reunification.



Where to Get More Help

Can I get help paying for medical care?

Maybe. For most medical programs, you can apply online at [wahealthplanfinder.org](https://www.wahealthplanfinder.org), by calling 1-855-923-4633 (1-855-WAFINDER), or by asking for a paper application from HealthPlanFinder or from your local DSHS office.

Get Legal Help

- **Apply online:** nwjustice.org/apply-online
- **Facing a legal issue in King County** (other than Eviction or Foreclosure)? Call 2-1-1 (or toll-free 1-877-211-9274) weekdays 8:00 am - 6:00 pm. They will refer you to a legal aid provider.
- **Facing a legal issue outside of King County** (other than Eviction or Foreclosure)? Call the CLEAR Hotline at 1-888-201-1014 weekdays between 9:15 am - 12:15 pm or apply online at nwjustice.org/apply-online.
- **Facing Eviction?** Call 1-855-657-8387.
- **Facing Foreclosure?** Call 1-800-606-4819.
- **Seniors (age 60 and over)** with a legal issue outside of King County can also call CLEAR*Sr at 1-888-387-7111.

Deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired callers can call any of these numbers using the relay service of your choice.

Interpreters provided.

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