

Handout T: Confidentiality

What does confidentiality mean?

All medical information is confidential. This means that it should not be shared with anyone unless you have permission from a parent or legal guardian. Medical information should only be shared with a signed consent form—often known as a “release of information” form. Consent to share information should be obtained only when someone has a “need to know.”

All records containing medical information must be handled and stored in ways that protect the families’ confidentiality. Know your program’s policy on confidentiality and record-keeping.

Who needs to know?

People “need to know” about a child’s medical condition if knowing helps best provide the care that the child needs. Most parents want their child’s caregivers to know about the child’s medical conditions so their child gets the best care possible. Some parents may choose not to tell staff about a child’s medical condition because they are afraid their child might be treated differently.

Head Start staff may not share medical information about anyone without the consent of the parent or legal guardian, even if you feel that person has a need to know. The exception is that emergency medical personnel should always be given medical information about a person they are treating.

What else do I need to know about confidentiality?

Know your agency policy and any laws and regulations governing confidentiality in your area. In some jurisdictions, HIV/AIDS has special confidentiality protections.

Public health departments require schools to report certain communicable diseases known as “Reportable Diseases.” Make sure your program has the list of reportable diseases and a process for reporting. Staff and parents should also be notified about communicable disease exposures, but without disclosing the identity of the ill person.