

Consent and Minors for COVID-19 Interventions

There is no "age of consent" for health care decisions in Nova Scotia. If your patient/client has the capacity to consent, they can give their consent to be vaccinated, regardless of age. A **mature minor** can consent for both testing and vaccination. Parental/legal guardian consent is not required. Consent given by a mature minor cannot be overturned by parents/legal guardians.

Who is considered a mature minor?

A person under the age of 19 is considered a **mature minor** if, in the judgement of the treating health care professional, they are able to appreciate the purpose and circumstances of the proposed intervention and the consequences of giving (or refusing) consent.

Guiding Principles

- The capacity to make a decision is not tied strictly to age but is a function of maturity and ability of the patient to understand the nature of the decision, to make and consequences of accepting or declining treatment.
- Preferential consent comes directly from the mature minor. This builds the capacity and health literacy of the individual.
- Ongoing testing and vaccination supports public health measures to reduce the impact of COVID-19.

Assessing if a person is a mature minor

A patient or client may be considered a mature minor for some interventions and not others. Using your critical judgement, consider the complexity of an intervention in relation to patient's individual health status and underlying conditions. If necessary, seek a second opinion from a second healthcare provider.

To assess consent, you must consider the patient's ability to understand the:

- Condition for which the specific intervention is being offered,
- Nature and purpose of the intervention,
- Risks and benefits of receiving intervention, and
- Risks and benefits of not receiving the intervention.

During your assessment, consider:

- The patient's ability to think and make choices
- The patient's ability to understand and communicate information relevant to the situation.

A mature minor needs to have access to and demonstrate an understanding of all information relevant to the decision in order to make an informed consent choice. This includes information about risks and benefits, their own health history or allergies, etc.

Consider using the "teach-back" method as an option to test the understanding of a patient or client. "Teach-back" involves asking the patient or client to re-phrase and summarize what the healthcare professional has told them about the intervention, including the risks and intended results.

Documentation

Document the assessment of your patient and note the factors that led to your decision that the patient or client was a mature minor who could provide (or refuse) consent for the intervention. [Insert link to form that shall be created here]

References

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- Nova Scotia Health Promotion and Protection. (2009). Guidelines for Youth Health Centres in Nova Scotia. Available at: <https://novascotia.ca/dhw/healthy-development/documents/Youth-Health-Centre-Standards-and-Guidelines.pdf>
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