

Why is information collected about your illness?

Under the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*, the Department of Health (the department) is authorised by law to collect information from doctors and laboratories about diagnoses of certain health related conditions in Victoria. The law exists to monitor and control the occurrence of infectious diseases and other specified conditions, and helps to prevent further illness.

The aim is to protect the health and safety of the community.

What happens to your health information?

The department is committed to protecting the privacy of your information. Only authorised staff can access the information. The information is analysed regularly to produce reports, however identifying information is NEVER included in those reports.

Some conditions require immediate contact with either your doctor and/or yourself to identify the cause and prevent further infections. Information about your illness is obtained directly from yourself or your doctor. If it is necessary to contact you, we will try to get consent from your treating doctor first.

Sometimes your information may be provided to officers at local government (local council) who are authorised under the law to assist with investigations. Identifying information is never released to any parties not directly involved in the investigation of the source of your illness.

If you have been exposed to lead in an occupational setting, your information may be provided to WorkSafe. Under the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2007, an employer in a workplace where a lead process is undertaken is required to notify WorkSafe of any lead-risk jobs in that workplace, as well as when an employee is removed from a lead-risk job due to elevated blood lead levels.

Other uses of your information

The National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System

– Some information on notifiable conditions is forwarded regularly to the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, which is responsible for monitoring the occurrence of infectious diseases throughout the whole of Australia. Information that identifies you is always removed before this occurs.

Teaching – Some information is used to help educate staff, plan for the future and evaluate current service provision. Information that identifies you is always removed before this occurs.

Research and audit – Information is only made available for research projects after the Department's 'Human Research Ethics Committee' has approved them. The Ethics Committee follows strict, nationally agreed guidelines for the review of research involving humans and health information. If anything to do with the research involves you personally, the researcher will contact you so you can decide if you want to take part. People who carry out research must follow strict guidelines and maintain the confidentiality of the information they access. Release of identifying information is extremely rare.

Can you, or your doctor, refuse to provide this information?

If the department is not provided with this information, there may be delays in preventing further exposure, and in planning control strategies. Doctors and pathology services are required by law to provide the Department with key information about you and your illness.

What about confidentiality?

All staff working in the department treat your information with the strictest confidence and have a legal duty to do so. Anyone who receives information from us is also under a legal obligation to keep it confidential.

Continued overleaf

Can you access your information?

Under the Freedom of Information Act you have the right to apply for information held by the department. The department keeps records in accordance with the *Health Records Act*.

Where can you find further information?

For infectious disease related enquires the Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit can be contacted by telephoning **1300 651160**. Further information can be found on the department's website at:

- www.health.vic.gov.au/ideas
- www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

For lead related enquiries the Environmental Health Unit can be contacted on **1300 761874**. Further information can be found on the department's website at:

- www.health.vic.gov.au/environment

WorkSafe Victoria can be contacted by telephoning **1800 136089**, or at the following website:

- www.worksafe.vic.gov.au

Information about the department's Privacy Principles can be found on the department's website at:

- www.health.vic.gov.au/privacy

Information about making a Freedom of Information request can be found on the department's website at:

- www.health.vic.gov.au/foi