



Legal Rights of the Pregnant Woman

By Lauren

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Women do not lose their constitutional or common law rights by becoming pregnant.

- The consent of a competent woman's husband is never required for her treatment.
- Women have a right to have another woman present during a physical examination.
- Women can refuse to be examined or treated by anyone.
- Women have a right to have the father of the child, or another advocate, present during childbirth and delivery.
- Pregnant women have a right to refuse any medical treatment or drug, including a cesarean section, episiotomy, anesthesia, and pain medication.
- A woman has a right to change her mind about any decision made before or during labor or childbirth.
- A woman and her newborn have a right to remain in a hospital up to 48 hours after a vaginal birth and 96 hours after a cesarean section (your goal, however, should be to get mother and child out of the hospital as soon as it is safe for them to be discharged).

Today, people who understand their rights as patients are more likely to successfully negotiate the health care system, use health insurance and managed care plans, and work with physicians and other health care professionals. Most important, a just health care system requires respect for the rights of patients. (Patient Rights Program, Health Law Department of the Boston University School of Public Health.)

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From [Reproductive Health in The Rights of Patients: The Basic ACLU Guide to Patients Rights.](#)