Obtaining informed consent over the telephone for studies that are telephone interviews presents special challenges. If the disclosure is too long, too detailed, or too difficult to follow, a prospective research participant may decide to end the conversation before consent can be obtained or otherwise decline the invitation to participate. Nevertheless, a researcher must obtain informed consent from a human participant before a study can begin, and the disclosure should include all the elements outlined in the governing regulations and provide such information in as simple terms as possible. The following sample statement is designed to provide the required information to prospective participants without overwhelming them into a decision not to participate in the study. Of course, this statement must be modified to fit the particulars of each study, especially in regard to the nature of the research, the risks of participation, and any assurance of confidentiality. Depending on study circumstances, the level of review (exempt, expedited, full board) and any Board requirements or alteration of requirements, information on whom to contact in event of injury (in non-exempt telephone surveys, most likely a breach of confidentiality) may need to be provided.

I am calling in regard to a research study being conducted at the University of Alabama. Your telephone number was selected at random from a list of telephone numbers of residents of Jefferson County. This research study examines how people feel about sexually transmitted infections. I would like to ask you some questions about this topic, which will take about 15 minutes of your time. None of these questions will ask you about personal matters and your answers will be kept confidential. Your participation will help provide better health care in this state with the only risk being that some of the questions may make you feel uncomfortable. However, answering these questions is voluntary. That means you may refuse to take part in this study or, if you decide to participate in the study, you may decide not to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable or to stop the interview at any time.

May I ask the first question?

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1 A statement that the study involves research.
2 An explanation of the purposes of the research.
3 A description of the procedures to be followed.
4 The expected duration of the subject’s participation.
5 A statement describing the extent, if any, to which confidentiality of records identifying the subject will be maintained.
6 A description of any benefits to the subject or to others which may reasonably be expected from the research.
7 A description of any reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts to the subject.
8 A statement that participation is voluntary, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled, and the subject may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled.