



# OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

# UNDERSTANDING THE HIPAA NOTICE

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) is a federal law that sets rules about who can look at and receive your health information. This law gives you rights over your health information and when it can be shared. It also requires your doctors, pharmacists and other health care providers, and your health plan to explain your rights and how your health information can be used or shared. Follow these steps to make sure you understand the Notice and your rights.

## 1. Get a Copy of the Notice of Privacy Practices.

When you see a doctor, check in to a hospital, start getting prescriptions filled by a pharmacy, or change health insurance coverage, you will likely get several forms to read and sign. One of those forms – called the Notice of Privacy Practices – explains your rights regarding your health information and tells you how your health information can be used or shared. Most doctors must give you the Notice at your first appointment, and most health plans must give you the Notice when you enroll. A copy of the Notice may also be posted in a clear, easy to find location in a doctor's office, pharmacy or hospital, be mailed to you by your health insurance company, or be posted on a doctor's or health insurance company's website. If you can't find it, ask for it. Your health provider or health insurance company must give it to anyone who asks.

## 2. Read the Notice.

### The notice will explain:

- How your health care provider or insurer is allowed to use or share your health information.
- Your privacy rights, which include your right to get a copy of your health file, review it, ask that it be corrected, and complain if you think your privacy rights have been violated.
- Your doctor or insurer's legal duties to protect your health information.
- Whom to contact for more information about your doctor or insurance company's privacy policies.

## 3. Ask Questions about the Notice or Your Rights.

The Notice should help you understand your privacy rights. If the information in the Notice is not clear, ask your health care provider or your health plan to explain it. You can also get more information at [www.hhs.gov/ocr/privacy/](http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/privacy/).

#### 4. Know What You are Signing.

The law requires your doctor, hospital, or other health care provider to ask for written proof that you received the Notice of Privacy Practices, or what they might call an “acknowledgement of receipt.” The law does not require you to sign the acknowledgement form.

If you choose not to sign, your provider must keep a record that they did not get your signature, but they still have to treat you.

If you choose to sign, you have not given up any of your rights or agreed to any special uses of your health records. You are just stating you got the Notice.

To learn more, visit [www.hhs.gov/ocr/privacy/](http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/privacy/).



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U.S. Department of Health & Human Services  
Office for Civil Rights