

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (better known as HIPAA) took effect on April 14, 2003. This first-ever government initiative to protect a patient's privacy, made a monumental impact on all aspects of our health care system. Although HIPAA is a nation-wide standard, each state does have its own specific laws in addition to the federal guidelines.

The privacy standards laid out by the federal government protect a patient and their rights regarding medical records and private health information (PHI). Pharmacies, hospitals, physician's offices and insurance plans have been required to take "necessary and reasonable measures" to assure compliance with HIPAA rules and regulations. For example, one compliance measure required each existing covered member receive a Notice of Privacy Practices prior to the April deadline. The Notice of Privacy Practices details specific rights and permissible usages of PHI. For more information regarding HIPAA and your rights under HIPAA, please visit www.hhs.gov.

An Authorization to Release Medical Information forms is needed if anyone outside of your household is to be authorized to receive your or your dependent's PHI.