



Q&A COVID-19 & Privacy

I hear people have been infected by COVID-19. Why won't the government tell us who has it? Government, medical, and public employees are bound by Federal law to protect personal medical information about patients. Personal medical information includes anything that could help identify one person out of many. So when government, medical, and public employs give news about COVID-19 infections, the information is intentionally general so no individual person is marked. If you've read, watched, or heard the news lately, you probably noticed that they report very general facts about infected people like general age (example: in their 30s), Male or Female, County they live in, and if they have traveled. The reason for this privacy and limited information is HIPAA, the Federal law.

HIPAA? What is HIPAA?

HIPAA is the **H**ealth **I**nsurance **P**ortability and **A**ccountability **A**ct.

That Doesn't Help! What is HIPAA?

HIPAA is a 1996 Federal law that restricts access to individuals' private medical information. The law that gives you legal rights and protection by keeping your personal information in health records between a doctor and patient. When you go to a doctor or medical provider, you often are asked to sign a sheet to give permission so the doctor can share relevant information about your health only to other medical providers you see.

Why is HIPAA important?

HIPAA Is a law that gives legal rights and protections to individuals by keeping personal information in health records between a doctor and patient. Your privacy is extremely important and HIPAA protects your personal health information from being shared without your permission. By protecting health privacy, HIPAA also protects communities from discrimination such as offering different products to different races, or increasing costs and decreasing services based on family history of illness.

How does HIPAA and privacy apply to the community?

HIPAA applies to government, medical, and public employees but not individual members of the public. The idea behind HIPAA is that people deserve respect and privacy and to be in control of their own personal privacy.

How can the community help people without knowing who is sick?

Volunteer for the community as a whole and when individual people reach out and ask for help, give help while practicing safe distances, wearing a mask, washing your hands, etc.

If we don't know who has it, how do we stay away from it and not get sick ourselves?

Individual people should have respect for their community and seek out medical attention if they have signs of illness, self-isolate to slow the spread, and practice good hygiene like washing their hands. The safest practice is to treat every member of our community as if they are sick and act to protect yourself.

What if my family shares my health conditions? Can they ask for community prayers?

HIPAA doesn't apply in this case. However, a person's health is personal; family and friends should respect each person's wishes. The prayers and care from the community is important. We urge the community to respect all individuals' privacy and work to stop speculation and rumors.