

<b>Answer ID</b> 349
<b>Category</b> Privacy of Health Information/HIPAA Disclosures for Law Enforcement Purposes
<b>Date Updated</b> 03/03/2003 06:35 PM

## Will the Privacy Rule make it easier for police and law enforcement to get my medical information?

### Question

Will this HIPAA Privacy Rule make it easier for police and law enforcement agencies to get my medical information?

### Answer

No. The Rule does not expand current law enforcement access to individually identifiable health information. In fact, it limits access to a greater degree than currently exists, since the Rule establishes new procedures and safeguards that restrict the circumstances under which a covered entity may give such information to law enforcement officers.

For example, the Rule limits the type of information that covered entities may disclose to law enforcement, absent a warrant or other prior process, when law enforcement is seeking to identify or locate a suspect. It specifically prohibits disclosure of DNA information for this purpose, absent some other legal requirements such as a warrant. Similarly, under most circumstances, the Privacy Rule requires covered entities to obtain permission from persons who have been the victim of domestic violence or abuse before disclosing information about them to law enforcement. In most States, such permission is not required today.

Where State law imposes additional restrictions on disclosure of health information to law enforcement, those State laws continue to apply. This Rule sets a national floor of legal protections; it is not a set of "best practices."

Even in those circumstances when disclosure to law enforcement is permitted by the Rule, the Privacy Rule does not require covered entities to disclose any information. Some other Federal or State law may require a disclosure, and the Privacy Rule does not interfere with the operation of these other laws. However, unless the disclosure is required by some other law, covered entities should use their professional judgment to decide whether to disclose information, reflecting their own policies and ethical principles. In other words, doctors, hospitals, and health plans could continue to follow their own policies to protect privacy in such instances.