

# What is Protected Health Information (PHI)?

For information to be considered PHI, it must meet all of the following three conditions:

1. The information is created, received, or maintained by a health provider or health plan.
2. The information is related to past, present or future health care or payment for that health care.
3. The information identifies a member or patient, or there is enough information to be able to identify the individual.

Health information that is not linked to an individual by one or more of the 18 HIPAA identifiers\* and for which there is no reasonable basis to believe that the information can be used to identify the individual is not protected health information.

Individually identifiable health information ceases to be PHI 50 years after death.

PHI can be in oral, written or electronic form:

Oral or Spoken	Written	Electronic (referred to as ePHI)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hallway or elevator conversations</li> <li>• Nurses' station conversations</li> <li>• Telephone appointment reminders</li> <li>• -only leave the minimum necessary</li> <li>• Names called in the waiting room, first and last name is allowable; do not add any information related to the reason for the visit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper medical records</li> <li>• Printed After Visit Summaries (AVS) or Discharge Instructions</li> <li>• Paper bills</li> <li>• Labels on medication bottles or packages and medication warning inserts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information maintained in or on: Laptops or desktop computers</li> <li>• Hand-held devices</li> <li>• Flash drives</li> <li>• Electronic medical records</li> <li>• Digital images or recordings</li> <li>• E-mail</li> </ul>

\* "HIPAA identifiers" means any of the following identifiers, either of the individual or of his/her relatives, employers or household members.

(1) Names
(2) All geographical subdivisions smaller than a State, including street address, city, county, precinct, zip code, and their equivalent geocodes, except for the initial three digits of a zip code, if according to the current publicly available data from the Bureau of the Census: (a) The geographic unit formed by combining all zip codes with the same three initial digits contains more than 20,000 people; and (b) The initial three digits of a zip code for all such geographic units containing 20,000 or fewer people is changed to 000
(3) All Date elements (except year) for dates directly related to an individual, including of birth date, an admission or discharge date, date of death; and all ages over 89 and any date (including year) indicative of such age, however such ages and elements may be aggregated into a single category of age 90 or older
(4) Telephone numbers
(5) Fax numbers
(6) Email addresses
(7) Social Security Numbers
(8) Medical record numbers
(9) Health plan beneficiary numbers
(10) Account numbers
(11) Certificate/license numbers
(12) Vehicle identifiers and serial numbers, including license plate numbers
(13) Device identifiers and serial numbers
(14) URLs
(15) Internet Protocol address numbers
(16) Biometric identifiers including finger and voice prints
(17) Full face photographic images and any comparable images; and
(18) Any other unique identifying number, characteristic, or code (provided that (a) the code or other record identifier is not derived from or related to other information (for example scramble MRNs and SSNs are not permitted) and not otherwise translatable to identify the individual; (b) the covered entity does not use or disclose the code or other record identifier for any other purpose; (c) and the covered entity does not disclose the mechanism for re-identification

Removal of all 18 HIPAA identifiers means the information is de-identified and no longer protected health information unless the covered entity has actual knowledge that the remaining information could be used alone or in combination with other information to identify an individual.