

Sharing Exposure Information with First Responders

We know that this is a stressful time and everyone is doing their best to ensure that those in the community have the information they need to keep themselves and others safe (and to minimize the spread of infection).

I also wanted to share that there has been no change or reduction in the HIPAA rules, only in the enforcement. This means, when possible, we need to continue choosing the right path to do the right thing. Below are some of the questions we are frequently receiving during this state of emergency related to COVID-19.

Can we share patient exposure information with EMS workers?

Yes. EMS workers are considered health care workers and minimal information can be shared when there is a common patient connection. Information should not be shared if EMS was not part of the patient's care.

Can we share information with police and fire workers? What about other enforcement officers?

Again, there has been no change in the federal requirements for sharing information with emergency responders such as firefighters, etc. There is still conflict with the federal and state law and this is not a viable option for disclosures to first responders re: exposure.

Because we are in a state of emergency, we ARE ALLOWED to share MINIMAL information re: exposure status.

The reason this difference is important is because when sharing information in an emergency situation, we must do the following:

1. Document that we shared the information because of an emergency AND
2. Notify the patient or representative of the disclosure as soon as possible.

What is "minimal information"?

Minimal information in most cases will be limited to a statement that there was or was not exposure. Detailed care information and additional identifiers or demographics should not be provided unless there is a specific requirement for this information.

If possible, please send those requesting patient information or releases to HIM/ medical records.

Please keep in mind, this guidance is related to the current state of emergency re: COVID-19.