



Effective Date: 09/23/08

NIAGARA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

NOTICE OF PRIVACY PRACTICES

THIS NOTICE DESCRIBES HOW MEDICAL INFORMATION ABOUT YOU MAY BE USED AND DISCLOSED AND HOW YOU CAN GET ACCESS TO THIS INFORMATION. PLEASE REVIEW IT CAREFULLY.

If you have any questions about this notice, please contact the division director/designee.

WHO WILL FOLLOW THIS NOTICE

This notice describes the Niagara County Health Department's practices and that of:

- Any health care professional authorized to enter information into your* chart.
- All divisions and units of the health department.
- Any volunteer or individual group we allow to help you while you are in the care of the department.
- All employees and staff.
- Any business associates, including billing agents, nursing homes and social and medical day care will follow this privacy notice. All these entities, sites and locations follow the terms of this notice. In addition, these entities, sites and locations may share medical information with each other for treatment, payment or health care operation purposes described in this notice.

OUR PLEDGE REGARDING MEDICAL INFORMATION

We understand that medical information about you and your health is personal. We are committed to protecting medical information about you. We create a record of the care and services you receive with the department. We need this record to provide you with quality care and to comply with certain legal requirements. This notice applies to all of the records of your care generated by the Niagara County Health Department. Your personal doctor may have different policies or notices regarding the doctor's use and disclosure of your medical information created in the doctor's office or clinic.

This notice will tell you about the ways in which we may use and disclose medical information about you. We also describe your rights and certain obligations we have regarding the use and disclosure of medical information.

We are required by law to:

- Make sure that medical information that identifies you is kept private;
- Give you this notice of our legal duties and privacy practices with respect to medical information about you;
- Follow the terms of the notice that is currently in effect; and
- HIPAA will not supercede state laws that impose more stringent standards with respect to the privacy of individually identifiable health information.

* **Wherever "you" / "your" is used in this notice, it will refer to either the individual receiving services or a child receiving service in one of our programs.**

HOW WE MAY USE AND DISCLOSE MEDICAL INFORMATION ABOUT YOU

The following categories describe different ways that we use and disclose medical information. For each category of uses or disclosures we will explain what we mean and try to give some examples. Not every use or disclosure in a category will be listed. However, all of the ways we are permitted to use and disclose information will fall within one of the categories.

- **For Treatment** We may use medical information about you to provide you with medical treatment or services. We may disclose medical information about you to doctors, nurses, technicians, or other personnel who are involved in taking care of you. For example, information obtained for children receiving services from Children With Special Health Care Needs may be shared with other divisions within the Health Department, such as Environmental Health and Nursing. Different divisions of the Niagara County Health Department may share medical information about you in order to coordinate the different services you need. We also may disclose medical information about you to people outside the department who may be involved in your medical care after you leave our service, such as family members or others we use to provide services that are part of your care.
- **For Payment** We may use and disclose medical information about you so that the treatment and services you receive may be billed to and payment may be collected from you, an insurance company or a third party. For example, we may need to give your health care information about treatment you received so your health plan will pay us or reimburse you for the care.
- **For Health Care Operations** We may use and disclose medical information about you for health care services. These uses and disclosures are necessary to make sure that all of our clients receive quality care. For example, we may use medical information to review our treatment and services and to evaluate the performance of our staff in caring for you. We may also combine medical information about many clients to decide what additional services we should offer, what services are not needed, and whether certain new treatments are effective. We may also disclose information to doctors, nurses, technicians, and other personnel for review and learning purposes. We may also combine the medical information we have with medical information from other providers to compare how we are doing and see where we can make improvements in the care and services we offer. We may remove information that identifies you from this set of medical information so others may use it to study health care and health care delivery without learning who the specific patients are.
- **Appointment Reminders** We may use and disclose medical information to contact you as a reminder that you have an appointment.
- **Health-Related Benefits and Services** We may use and disclose medical information to tell you about health-related benefits or services that may be of interest to you.
- **Individuals Involved in Your Care or Payment for Your Care** We may release medical information about you to a friend or family member who is involved in your medical care. We may also give information to someone who helps pay for your care. In addition, we may disclose medical information about you to an entity assisting in a disaster relief effort so that your family can be notified about your condition, status and location.
- **Research** Under certain circumstances, we may use and disclose medical information about you for research purposes. For example, a research project may involve comparing the health and recovery of all clients who received one medication to those who received another, for the same condition. All research projects, however, are subject to a special approval process. This process evaluates a proposed research project and its use of medical information, trying to balance the research needs with clients' need for privacy of their medical information. Before we use or disclose medical information for research, the project will have been approved through this research approval process, but we may, however, disclose medical information about you to people preparing to conduct a

research project, for example, to help them look for patients with specific medical needs, so long as the medical information they review does not leave the department. We will always ask for your specific permission if the researcher will have access to your name, address or other information that reveals who you are, or will be involved in your care.

- **As Required By Law** We will disclose medical information about you when required to do so by federal, state or local law.
- **To Avert a Serious Threat to Health or Safety** We may use and disclose medical information about you when necessary to prevent a serious threat to your health and safety or the health and safety of the public or another person. Any disclosure, however, would only be to someone able to help prevent the threat.

SPECIAL SITUATIONS

- **Workers' Compensation** We may release medical information about you for workers' compensation or similar programs. These programs provide benefits for work-related injuries or illness.
- **Public Health Risks** We may disclose medical information about you for public health activities. These activities generally include the following:
 - To prevent or control disease, injury or disability
 - To report births and deaths
 - To report child abuse or neglect
 - To report reactions to medications or problems with products
 - To notify people of recalls of products they may be using
 - To notify a person who may have been exposed to a disease or may be at risk for contracting or spreading a disease or condition
 - To notify the appropriate government authority if we believe a patient has been the victim of abuse, neglect or domestic violence. We will only make this disclosure if you agree or when required or authorized by law.
- **Health Oversight Activities** We may disclose medical information to a health oversight agency for activities authorized by law. These oversight activities include, for example, audits, investigations, inspections, and licensure. These activities are necessary for the government to monitor the health care system, government programs, and compliance with civil rights laws.
- **Lawsuits and Disputes** If you are involved in a lawsuit or a dispute, we may disclose medical information about you in response to a court or administrative order. We may also disclose medical information about you in response to a subpoena, discovery request, or other lawful process by someone else involved in the dispute, but only if efforts have been made to tell you about the request or to obtain an order protecting the information requested.
- **Law Enforcement** We may release medical information if asked to do so by a law enforcement official:
 - In response to a court order, subpoena, warrant, summons or similar process
 - To identify or locate a suspect, fugitive, material witness, or missing person

- About the victim of a crime if, under certain limited circumstances, we are unable to obtain the person's agreement
 - About a death we believe may be the result of criminal conduct
 - About criminal conduct at the department; and
 - In emergency circumstances to report a crime; the location of the crime or victims; or the identity, description or location of the person who committed the crime.
- **National Security and Intelligence Activities** We may release medical information about you to authorized federal officials for intelligence, counterintelligence, and other national security activities authorized by law.
 - **Protective Services for the President and Others** We may disclose medical information about you to authorized federal officials so they may provide protection to the President, other authorized persons or foreign heads of state or conduct special investigations.
 - **Inmates** If you are an inmate of a correctional institution or under the custody of a law enforcement official, we may release medical information about you to the correctional institution or law enforcement official. This release would be necessary (1) for the institution to provide you with health care; (2) to protect your health and safety or the health and safety of others; or (3) for the safety and security of the correctional institution.

YOUR RIGHTS REGARDING MEDICAL INFORMATION ABOUT YOU

You have the following rights regarding medical information we maintain about you:

- **Right to Inspect and Copy** You have the right to inspect and copy medical information that may be used to make decisions about your care. Usually, this includes medical and billing records, but does not include psychotherapy notes.

To inspect and copy medical information that may be used to make decisions about you, you must submit your request in writing to the division director/designee. If you request a copy of the information, we may charge a fee for the costs of copying, mailing or other supplies associated with your request.

We may deny your request to inspect and copy in certain very limited circumstances. If you are denied access to medical information, you may request that the denial be reviewed. Another licensed health care professional chosen by the department will review your request and the denial. The person conducting the review will not be the person who denied your request. We will comply with the outcome of the review.

- **Right to Amend** If you feel that medical information we have about you is incorrect or incomplete, you may ask us to amend the information. You have the right to request an amendment for as long as the information is kept by or for the department.

To request an amendment, your request must be made in writing and submitted to the division director/designee. In addition, you must provide a reason that supports your request.

We may deny your request for an amendment if it is not in writing or does not include a reason to support the request. In addition, we may deny your request if you ask us to amend information that:

- Was not created by us, unless the person or entity that created the information is no longer available to make the amendment
 - Is not part of the medical information kept by or for the department
 - Is not part of the information which you would be permitted to inspect and copy or
 - Is accurate and complete.
- **Right to an Accounting of Disclosures** You have the right to request an "accounting of disclosures." This is a list of the disclosures we made of medical information about you. To request this list or accounting of disclosures, you must submit your request in writing to the division director/designee. Your request must state a time period, which may not be longer than six years and may not include dates before April 14, 2003. Your request should indicate in what form you want the list (for example, on paper, electronically). The first list you request within a 12-month period will be free. For additional lists, we may charge you for the costs of providing the list. We will notify you of the cost involved and you may choose to withdraw or modify your request at that time before any costs are incurred.
 - **Right to Request Restrictions** You have the right to request a restriction or limitation on the medical information we use or disclose about you for treatment, payment or health care operations. You also have the right to request a limit on the medical information we disclose about you to someone who is involved in your care or the payment for your care, like a family member or friend. For example, you could ask that we not use or disclose information about treatment you had.

We are not required to agree to your request. If we do agree, we will comply with your request unless the information is needed to provide you emergency treatment.

To request restrictions, you must make your request in writing to the division director/designee. In your request, you must tell us (1) what information you want to limit; (2) whether you want to limit our use, disclosure or both; and (3) to whom you want the limits to apply, for example, disclosures to your spouse.

- **Right to Request Confidential Communications** You have the right to request that we communicate with you about medical matters in a certain way or at a certain location. For example, you can ask that we only contact you at work or by mail.

To request confidential communications, you must make your request in writing to the division director/designee. We will not ask you the reason for your request. We will accommodate all reasonable requests. Your request must specify how or where you wish to be contacted.

- **Right to a Paper Copy of This Notice** You have the right to a paper copy of this notice. You may ask us to give you a copy of this notice at any time.

You may obtain a copy of this notice at our website www.niagaracounty.com.

To obtain a paper copy of this notice, contact the division director/designee.

CHANGES TO THIS NOTICE

- We reserve the right to change this notice. We reserve the right to make the revised or changed notice effective for medical information we already have about you as well as any information we receive in the future. We will post a copy of the current notice in the department. The notice will contain on the first page, in the top right-hand corner, the effective date. In addition, each time you register at or are admitted for treatment or health care services, we will offer you a copy of the current notice in effect.

COMPLAINTS

If you believe your privacy rights have been violated, you may file a complaint with the department or with the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services. To file a complaint with the Niagara County Health Department, contact the division director/designee [Nursing Division (716) 439-7470, Environmental Health Division (716) 439-7444, Children With Special Needs, (716) 439-7463, Niagara County Public Health Director (716) 439-7430. All complaints must be submitted in writing.

You will not be penalized for filing a complaint.

OTHER USES OF MEDICAL INFORMATION

Other uses and disclosures of medical information not covered by this notice or the laws that apply to us will be made only with your written permission. If you provide us permission to use or disclose medical information about you, you may revoke that permission, in writing, at any time. If you revoke your permission, we will no longer use or disclose medical information about you for the reasons covered by your written authorization. You understand that we are unable to take back any disclosures we have already made with your permission, and that we are required to retain our records of the care that we provided to you.

NIAGARA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

NOTICE OF PRIVACY PRACTICES ACKNOWLEDGEMENT FORM

Our Notice of Privacy Practices provides information about how we may use and disclose protected health information about you. You have the right to review our notice before signing this acknowledgment.

I hereby acknowledge receipt of the Niagara County Health Department's Notice of Privacy Practices.

Name (print)

Date

Name (signature)

Witness

I, or a member of the Niagara County Health Department, exercised a good faith effort to obtain the signature on the above acknowledgment from the client named above. Our good faith efforts to obtain signature included requesting that the patient sign this acknowledgment at the time we provided him/her with a copy of the Niagara County Health Department's Notice of Privacy Practices. Despite our good faith effort, the patient failed or refused to sign the above acknowledgment.

Niagara County Health Department

Date

If known, note reason signature not obtained: _____

Acknowledgment

Notice of Privacy Practices 3/03 **QA**