

Loyola University prides itself in the secure storage and transfer of protected information. One of these information types is health and personal information that are subject to the federal classification of HIPAA.

HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) violations can occur in various ways, often unintentionally. Here are some common examples:

1. **Unauthorized Access:** Employees accessing patient records without authorization, whether out of curiosity or personal interest.
 - **Prevention:** Implement strict access controls and train employees on the importance of patient confidentiality. Use secure passwords and limit access to sensitive information only to those who need it for their job roles.
2. **Lost or Stolen Devices:** Devices such as laptops, smartphones, or tablets containing patient information are lost or stolen.
 - **Prevention:** Encrypt all devices that contain patient information. Implement remote wiping capabilities so that if a device is lost or stolen, sensitive data can be erased remotely. Train employees to safeguard their devices and report any losses immediately.
3. **Improper Disposal of Records:** Improper disposal of physical records or electronic devices containing patient information, such as throwing away paper records without shredding or wiping hard drives before disposal.
 - **Prevention:** Establish clear policies and procedures for the disposal of patient records. Provide secure bins for disposing of physical records and ensure that electronic devices are properly wiped clean before disposal or recycling.
4. **Unsecured Transmission of Data:** Transmitting patient information over unsecured channels, such as email or fax, which can be intercepted by unauthorized parties.
 - **Prevention:** Use secure communication channels for transmitting patient information, such as encrypted email or secure file transfer protocols. Implement encryption protocols for fax transmissions or use secure online portals for sharing sensitive information.
5. **Inadequate Training and Awareness:** Employees are not adequately trained on HIPAA regulations or are unaware of their responsibilities regarding patient privacy.
 - **Prevention:** Provide regular training sessions on HIPAA regulations and the importance of patient privacy. Ensure that employees understand the consequences of violating HIPAA rules and provide clear guidelines on handling patient information.
6. **Data Breaches:** Unauthorized access or disclosure of patient information due to security breaches, such as hacking or malware attacks.
 - **Prevention:** Implement robust cybersecurity measures, including firewalls, intrusion detection systems, and regular security audits. Encrypt sensitive data both in transit and at rest, and have a response plan in place in case of a data breach.

By implementing these preventive measures and fostering a culture of awareness and compliance, organizations can significantly reduce the risk of HIPAA violations and safeguard patient privacy. Regular training, strict access controls, encryption, and secure communication channels are essential components of a comprehensive HIPAA compliance program.

In this quarter's newsletter, ITS is sharing some tips for protecting yourself from HIPAA violations:

- **Be aware of your rights:** As a patient, you have the right to access your medical records and to control who has access to them. Familiarize yourself with the HIPAA Privacy Rule and understand how it protects your health information.
- **Keep your medical information private:** Don't share your medical information with anyone unless you trust them, and they have a legitimate need to know. This includes not discussing your medical information on social media.
- **Use strong passwords:** If you have access to electronic health records, make sure you use a strong, unique password that you change regularly. Don't share your password with anyone else.
- **Encrypt your devices:** If you store PHI on your computer or mobile device, make sure it is encrypted to protect it in case of theft or loss.
- **Report any suspected violations:** If you suspect that your health information has been improperly accessed or disclosed, report it to your healthcare provider or the Department of Health and Human Services.

By following these tips and being vigilant about protecting your health information, you can help prevent HIPAA violations and protect your privacy. To keep compliant with the HIPAA Privacy Rule, ITS distributes a quarterly newsletter to raise HIPAA awareness. For information on HIPAA @ Loyola please contact hipaa-privacy@luc.edu.