

# HHS' New Model Notice of Privacy Practices that Benefits Everyone

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Have you ever read that riveting packet of papers you get from the doctor's office or health insurer labeled "Notice of Privacy Practices"? No? Well, don't worry; you're not alone. But now that the Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) has just released new model notices of privacy practices you may actually want to read- and actually be able to understand.

HHS' new Model Notices of Privacy Practice were designed so they could be quickly adopted by your [doctor or hospital](#) [2], and your [insurer](#) [3].

This notice is an important tool that provides patients and the general public with education about their rights under the HIPAA Privacy Rule, and about how their information can be shared and when their authorization is required. Your doctor, hospital and insurer are required by HIPAA to provide you with these notices, but few people bother to read them and most are essentially unreadable. Research into the [readability](#) [4] of privacy notices [has found](#) [5] that the average notice is written at the level of at least a second-year college student on the Flesch Reading Ease Score. Only about 27% of the adult population over the age of 25 in the United States has a bachelor's degree (and nearly 16% have less than a high school education.)

Another problem with privacy notices is that they can quickly become outdated when new regulations take effect. Medical professional organizations have attempted to help their members meet their HIPAA obligations by developing their own [model notices of privacy practices](#) [6]. Such models are helpful, but tend to focus more on meeting the needs of health care providers and do not necessarily address the readability problems for patients.

Fortunately, the new model notices released by HHS help address these issues through the use of information presented in an outline format, with bullet points underneath each section containing short and simple one-to-two sentence explanations. Health plans and health care providers benefit from the new model notices since they incorporate the changes made to the HIPAA Privacy Rule this year and can be updated without printing new pamphlets. Hopefully, these model notices are widely adopted so that patients, and health care providers benefit. When the patient is better informed, better privacy decisions are likely.

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