



## **Guidance on ISDH Field Epidemiologist Access to Confidential Information**

We want to reassure all health care providers that they can release information to Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH) staff during an epidemiological investigation and that this is not prohibited by HIPAA. As part of its mission to protect, promote and provide for public health in the state, ISDH assists local health departments with disease outbreak investigations, contact tracing, case investigation and follow up.

**This process requires that ISDH field epidemiologists obtain access to confidential medical or epidemiological information, including, but not limited to, case investigation forms, questionnaires, and reports from hospitals, physicians, and laboratories. The ISDH currently is in the process of such a disease investigation and requests access to and copies of any and all medical and epidemiological records that the ISDH field epidemiologist deems necessary.**

The **ISDH**, as part of an **investigation of a disease outbreak** that is potentially dangerous to the public health, **has the authority to inspect and photocopy medical and epidemiological information wherever found.** Authority for this is found at 410 IAC 1-2.3-49(g) which reads as follows:

**Medical or epidemiological information wherever maintained, concerning reportable cases, shall be made available to the commissioner or the commissioner's designee.**

**Any information obtained in the course of public health investigations, such as this one, whether from patient records or other sources, will be maintained by the ISDH as confidential under Indiana Code 16-41-8-1 and 410 IAC 1-2.3-50.**

**The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, P.L. 104-191 (HIPAA) does not prevent the disclosure of medical or epidemiological information to public health authorities such as the ISDH. In fact, section 1178(b) of HIPAA reads:**

**Nothing in this part shall be construed to invalidate or limit the authority, power, or procedures established under any law providing for the reporting of disease or injury, child abuse, birth, or death, public health surveillance, or public health investigation or intervention.**

**The HIPAA privacy rule at 45 CFR 164.512(b) echoes the statutory language cited above allowing disclosure of protected health information to a public health authority for purposes of preventing or controlling disease, including public health investigations.**

**Contact Information  
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