



MAR 04 2003

Dear Tribal Leaders, Tribal Health Directors, Area Directors, and Service Unit Directors:

The Indian Health Service (IHS) continues to prepare for the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Privacy Rule compliance date of April 14, 2003. Specific training on newly developed HIPAA-compliant health care forms, and policies and procedures will be conducted by IHS Area Offices by April 14.

Important points to remember:

- A covered entity that is a health plan (such as the IHS) must mail its HIPAA Notice of Privacy Practices (Notice) to all of its members prior to the April 14 compliance date. The Notice explains patient rights and covered-entity responsibilities.
- The Department has sent notification that the HIPAA Security Rule will be published in the February 20, 2003, Federal Register. Most covered entities will have an additional 2 years (until April 21, 2005) to comply with the newly published rules (see enclosure).
- Materials found at the IHS HIPAA Web site are developed specifically for the IHS as a covered entity. Non-IHS programs may have different requirements.
- Under the HIPAA Transaction Rule, covered entities that have requested an extension have until October 16, 2003, to comply.

For your information, I have enclosed documents showing the IHS's activity in connection with the Transaction and Privacy rules. This information also is available on the IHS HIPAA Web site (<http://www.ihs.gov/AdminMngrResources/HIPAA/ERRoom.cfm>). You may view the IHS HIPAA-compliant documents to assist with your own program needs.

Please visit <http://www.ihs.gov/AdminMngrResources/HIPAA/index.cfm> for continuing updates on HIPAA issues such as IHS health care forms, policies, and procedures, and other HIPAA-related information.

To access this letter on the IHS Web site at [www.ihs.gov](http://www.ihs.gov), click on "Tribal Leaders."

I will provide further information in the future on this important matter that will help improve the health status of American Indian and Alaska Native people.

Sincerely yours,

Charles W. Grim, D.D.S., M.H.S.A.  
Assistant Surgeon General  
Interim Director

Enclosures (6)