

NIH eRA System Password Policy FAQs

Q1: Why is there an NIH eRA Password Policy?

A: The password policy is in place to reduce the risk of unauthorized access to servers and databases essential to the mission of the NIH eRA System.

Q2: When will my password expire?

A: Your password will expire according to the following schedule and then every 180 days thereafter.

Passwords will expire in alpha order on the following schedule, based on your eRA System (IMPAC II) user name:

User Name begins with:	Password expiration date
A–C	December 10, 2003
D–L	January 7, 2004
M–P	February 11, 2004
Q–Z	March 10, 2004

You will have 10 days to change your password starting from the first date that you log in after the expiration date. If your password expires on January 7, but you don't log in until January 15, you will have until January 25 to change your password. If you don't change your password by January 25, you will be forced to change your password the next time you try to log in. ***It is recommended that you change your password the first time you are notified.***

So, if your user name is "BrownA," you should have received a notice to change your password already. If your user name is "MerritS," you will receive a notice ten days prior Feb. 11, 2004.

Q3 I changed my password and then tried to log into QVR or ECB right away but got an error that my password was incorrect. Why won't my new password work?

A: It can take up to an hour for your new password to take effect in all the eRA Systems. Some systems, ECB and QVR as examples, use the eRA reporting database (IRDB). So, if you've changed your password but it doesn't work right away with ECB, QVR or IQR (IC Query and Reporting) and you need to use one of these systems immediately, just try your old password.

Q4: Does everyone have to comply or just those with access to sensitive data?

A: Everyone who has access to eRA servers and databases, using the eRA Commons and the eRA System (IMPAC II) as well as development and test servers and databases and personal workstations used to access these servers and databases must comply. So, yes, everyone has to comply with the new password policy.

Q5: How often do I have to change my password?

A: You will have to change your password every 180 days. You will receive a message that it is time to change your password and will be given a grace period of 10 days to do so. It is recommended that you change the password the first time you are notified.

Q6: How will I know when I have to change my password?

A: You will receive an alert message at log-on that says that you have 10 days to change your password.

Q7: Do I have to make my password have special characters or a certain number of non-blank characters?

A: Yes, your password is required to have the following characteristics:
Must be at least 8 non-blank characters long
Must be a mixture of letters, numbers and must contain at least one of the following special characters ! # \$ % * - _ = + < >
The first and last characters cannot be numbers
The first character cannot be an asterisk
It cannot contain your log-in name
It cannot be a password that you've used in the last year

Note: If you try five times to log in and are unsuccessful, you will be locked out. In that case, contact the eRA Helpdesk (helpdesk@od.nih.gov, 301-402-7469, 1-866-504-9552).

Q8 I tried to change my password but got the error “Password does not conform to eRA password guidelines. Password can only contain numbers, letters, and special characters. Please choose a new password.” I am using letters, number and special characters and my password is at least 8 characters long. Why am I getting this error?

A: Make sure you are only using allowable special characters; not all special characters can be used. The following are allowable special characters! # \$ % * - _ = + < >

Q9: My IC Coordinator changed my password for me but when I logged in, I got an alert that it was expired and I had to change it. Why?

A: Part of any password or security policy is that only the authorized user should know their login information. To ensure that only you know your password, if it is changed by an IC Coordinator via the User Administration Module, you will be asked to change it at first login; it will be pre-expired. Just follow the steps to change it and begin using your new password.

Q10: What are some examples of a password?

A: Examples: oahu2003\$; t0lk!\$4n; erai2=fun; heave45*; freesia%4r. Choose some 8-letter word that has meaning to you, substitute the last three to four letters with a combination of numbers and special characters.

Q11: What if I forget my password?

A: You'll have to contact the eRA Helpdesk (helpdesk@od.nih.gov, 301-402-7469, 1-866-504-9552) or your IC's eRA Coordinator. This process has not changed; in the past, if you couldn't remember your password, you contacted your IC Coordinator.

Q12: I keep forgetting my password so I tried five different ones and they didn't work so now I'm locked out. What do I do?

A: You will have to contact the eRA Helpdesk. You have five chances to enter your correct password. If you don't get your password right after five tries, you are automatically locked out and have to contact the eRA Helpdesk (helpdesk@od.nih.gov, 301-402-7469, 1-866-504-9552). In the future, try to choose a password that you can more easily remember.

Q13: I only have to log into the NIH system a couple of times a year. I tried using the password you gave me the last time and a message comes up saying it is expired. What do I do?

A: Since passwords expire every 180 days, the password you used is now expired. Follow the instructions to change your password.

Q14: If I have a problem with changing my password, is there someone in my IC I can contact or should I contact the eRA Helpdesk?

A: For this first implementation of the password policy, you can contact the eRA Helpdesk

directly (helpdesk@od.nih.gov, 301-402-7469, 1-866-504-9552). Once everyone has gone through the change process once (April 2004), you can contact your IC Coordinator/Admin. Should the ICC be unable to solve your problem, contact the eRA Helpdesk.