

# **Notice of Privacy Practices**

## **For Houston Allergy & Asthma Associates (“the practice”)**

**This notice describes how medical information about you may be used and disclosed and how you can get access to this information. Please review it carefully.**

**Federal regulations developed under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) require that the practice provide you with this notice. This notice describes our privacy practices. You can request a copy of this notice at any time.**

### **Protected Health Information (PHI)**

“Protected health information” is medical information created or received by your health care provider that contains information that may be used to identify you, such as demographic data. It includes written or oral health information that relates to your past, present or future physical or mental health; the provision of health care to you; and your past, present and future payment for health care.

### **Treatment, Payment, Health Care Operations**

This practice uses and discloses health information about you for treatment, to obtain payment for treatment, for health care operations, and to evaluate the quality of care that you receive. These disclosures may be made in writing, electronically, by facsimile, or orally.

#### **Treatment**

We are permitted to use and disclose your medical information to those involved in your treatment. For example, the physicians in this practice are specialists. When we provide treatment, we may request that your primary care physician share your medical information with us. Also, we may provide your primary care physician information about your particular condition so that he or she can appropriately treat you for other medical conditions. Other examples are when the practice provides information to a pharmacy to fill a prescription, to an x-ray facility to order an x-ray, or to a lab to order lab tests. In our practice CT scan images of the sinuses done in AAA facilities may be transmitted electronically to outside radiologists to be read and evaluated.

#### **Payment**

We are permitted to use and disclose your medical information to determine eligibility for benefits, get approval for a recommended treatment, and to bill and collect payment for the services provided to you. For example, we may submit a claim form to obtain payment from your insurer or HMO. The claim will contain medical information, such as a description of the medical service provided to you, that your insurer or HMO needs to approve payment to us.

#### **Health Care Operations**

We are permitted to use or disclose your medical information for the purposes of health care operations, which are activities that support this practice and ensure that quality care is delivered. For example, we may engage the services of a professional to aid this practice in its compliance programs. This person will review billing and medical files to ensure we maintain our compliance with regulations and the law.

## **Disclosures That Can Be Made Without Your Authorization**

There are situations in which we are permitted by law to disclose or use your medical information without your written authorization or an opportunity to object. In other situations we will ask for your written authorization before using or disclosing any identifiable health information about you. If you choose to sign an authorization to disclose information, you can later revoke that authorization, in writing, to stop future uses and disclosures. However, any revocation will not apply to disclosures or uses already made or taken in reliance on that authorization.

### **Public Health, Abuse or Neglect, and Health Oversight**

We may disclose your medical information for public health activities. Public health activities are mandated by federal, state, or local government for the collection of information about disease, vital statistics (like births and death), or injury by a public health authority. We may disclose medical information, if authorized by law, to a person who may have been exposed to a disease or may be at risk for contracting or spreading a disease or condition. We may disclose your medical information to report reactions to medications, problems with products, or to notify people of recalls of products they may be using.

We may also disclose medical information to a public agency authorized to receive reports of child abuse or neglect. Texas law requires physicians to report child abuse or neglect. Regulations also permit the disclosure of information to report abuse or neglect of elders or the disabled.

We may disclose your medical information to a health oversight agency for those activities authorized by law. Examples of these activities are audits, investigations, licensure applications and inspections which are all government activities undertaken to monitor the health care delivery system and compliance with other laws, such as civil rights laws.

### **Legal Proceedings and Law Enforcement**

We may disclose your medical information in the course of judicial or administrative proceedings in response to an order of the court (or the administrative decision-maker) or other appropriate legal process. Certain requirements must be met before the information is disclosed.

If asked by a law enforcement official, we may disclose your medical information under limited circumstances provided that the information:

- Is released pursuant to legal process, such as a warrant or subpoena;
- Pertains to a victim of crime and you are incapacitated;
- Pertains to a person who has died under circumstances that may be related to criminal conduct;
- Is about a victim of crime and we are unable to obtain the person's agreement;
- Is released because of a crime that has occurred on these premises; or
- Is released to locate a fugitive, missing person, or suspect.

We may also release information if we believe the disclosure is necessary to prevent or lessen an imminent threat to the health or safety of a person.

### **Workers' Compensation**

We may disclose your medical information as required by the Texas workers' compensation law.

**Inmates**

We may release your medical information to a correctional institution or law enforcement official if you are an inmate or under the custody of law enforcement. This release is permitted to allow the institution to provide you with medical care, to protect your health or the health and safety of others, or for the safety and security of the institution.

**Military, National Security and Intelligence Activities, Protection of the President**

We may disclose your medical information for specialized governmental functions such as separation or discharge from military service, requests as necessary by appropriate military command officers (if you are in the military), authorized national security and intelligence activities, as well as authorized activities for the provision of protective services for the President of the United States, other authorized government officials, or foreign heads of state.

**Research, Organ Donation, Coroners, Medical Examiners, and Funeral Directors**

When a research project and its privacy protections have been approved by an Institutional Review Board or privacy board, we may release medical information to researchers for research purposes. We may release medical information to organ procurement organizations for the purpose of facilitating organ, eye, or tissue donation if you are a donor. Also, we may release your medical information to a coroner or medical examiner to identify a deceased or a cause of death. Further, we may release your medical information to a funeral director where such a disclosure is necessary for the director to carry out his duties.

**Required by Law**

We may release your medical information where the disclosure is required by law.

**Your Rights Under Federal Privacy Regulations**

The United States Department of Health and Human Services created regulations intended to protect patient privacy as required by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Those regulations create several privileges that patients may exercise. We will not retaliate against a patient that exercises their HIPAA rights.

**Requested Restrictions**

You may request that we restrict or limit how your protected health information is used or disclosed for treatment, payment, or healthcare operations. We do NOT have to agree to this restriction, but if we do agree, we will comply with your request except under emergency circumstances.

To request a restriction, submit the following in writing: (a) The information to be restricted, (b) what kind of restriction you are requesting (i.e. on the use of information, disclosure of information or both), and (c) to whom the limits apply. Please send your written request to the office manager at the Allergy & Asthma Associates office where you are seen or the Privacy Officer and address listed on the last page of this document.

You may also request that we limit disclosure to family members, other relatives, or close personal friends that may or may not be involved in your care.

### **Receiving Confidential Communications by Alternative Means**

You may request that we send communications of protected health information by alternative means or to an alternative location. Please send your written request to the office manager at the Allergy & Asthma Associates office where you are seen or the Privacy Officer and address listed on the last page of this document. We are required to accommodate only *reasonable* requests. Please specify in your correspondence exactly how you want us to communicate with you and, if you are directing us to send it to a particular place, the contact/address information. You are not required to provide an explanation for your request.

### **Inspection and Copies of Protected Health Information**

You may inspect and/or obtain a copy of health information that is within the designated record set, which is information that is used to make decisions about your care. Texas law requires that requests for copies be made in writing and we ask that requests for inspection of your health information also be made in writing. Please send your written request to the office manager at the Allergy & Asthma Associates office where you are seen or the Privacy Officer and address listed on the last page of this document.

### **We can refuse to provide some of the information you ask to inspect or ask to be copied if the information:**

- Includes psychotherapy notes.
- Includes the identity of a person who provided information if it was obtained under a promise of confidentiality.
- Is subject to the Clinical Laboratory Improvements Amendments of 1988.
- Has been compiled in anticipation of litigation.

We can refuse to provide access to or copies of some information for other reasons, provided that we provide a review of our decision on your request. Another licensed health care provider who was not involved in the prior decision to deny access will make any such review.

Texas law requires that we are ready to provide copies or a narrative within 15 days of your request. We will inform you of when the records are ready or if we believe access should be limited. If we deny access, we will inform you in writing.

HIPAA permits us to charge a reasonable cost based fee. The Texas State Board of Medical Examiners (TSBME) has set limits on fees for copies of medical records that under some circumstances may be lower than the charges permitted by HIPAA. In any event, the *lower* of the fee permitted by HIPAA or the fee permitted by the TSBME will be charged.

### **Amendment of Medical Information**

You may request an amendment of your medical information in the designated record set. Any such request must be made in writing to the person listed below. We will respond within 60 days of your request. We may refuse to allow an amendment if the information that is the subject of the request:

- Wasn't created by this practice or the physicians/providers in this practice.
- Is not part of the Designated Record Set.
- Is not available for inspection because of an appropriate denial.
- Is accurate and complete.

Even if we refuse to allow an amendment you are permitted to include a patient statement about the information at issue in your medical record. If we refuse to allow an amendment we will inform you in writing. If we approve the amendment, we will inform you in writing, allow the amendment to be made and inform others of the amendment who may have received your health information.

### **Accounting of Certain Disclosures**

The HIPAA privacy regulations permit you to request, and us to provide, an accounting of disclosures that are other than for treatment, payment, health care operations, or made via an authorization signed by you or your representative. Please submit your written request for an accounting to the office manager at the Allergy & Asthma Associates office where you are seen or the Privacy Officer listed on the last page of this document. Please state the time period for which you wish the accounting to include up to a six-year period. The practice is not required to provide an accounting for disclosures that take place prior to April 14, 2003. Your first accounting of disclosures (within a 12 month period) will be free. For additional requests within that period we are permitted to charge for the cost of providing the list. If there is a charge we will notify you and you may choose to withdraw or modify your request *before* any costs are incurred.

### **Appointment Reminders, Treatment Alternatives, and Other Health-related Benefits**

We may contact you by telephone, mail, or both to provide appointment reminders, treatment plans, information about treatment alternatives, or other health-related benefits and services that may be of interest to you.

### **Complaints**

If you are concerned that your privacy rights have been violated, you may contact the person listed below. You may also send a written complaint to the United States Department of Health and Human Services. We will not retaliate against you for filing a complaint with the government or us. The contact information for the United States Department of Health and Human Services is:

**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**

**HIPAA Complaint**

**7500 Security Blvd., C5-24-04**

**Baltimore, MD 21244**

### **Our Promise to You**

We are required by law and regulation to protect the privacy of your medical information, to provide you with this notice of our privacy practices with respect to protected health information, and to abide by the terms of the notice of privacy practices in effect.

### **Questions and Contact Person for Requests**

If you have any questions or want to make a request pursuant to the rights described above, please contact the office manager at the Allergy & Asthma Associates office location where you are seen or below:

**Allergy & Asthma Associates**

**Attention: Privacy Officer**

**450 Gears Road Suite 420A**

**Houston, Texas 77067**

**Telephone 281-875-8428**

**Fax 281-874-0018**

**This notice is effective on April 14, 2003.**

We may change our policies and this notice at any time and have those revised policies apply to all the protected health information we maintain. If or when we change our notice, we will post the new notice in the office where it can be seen.