

Notice Regarding Shiprock Service Unit Privacy Breach

The Navajo Area Indian Health Service (IHS) recently discovered a privacy breach affecting approximately 7,500 Northern Navajo Medical Center patients in Shiprock, New Mexico. IHS wants to reassure patients that at this time, IHS has no knowledge that any information has been used inappropriately and is providing patients with information on what happened and the steps IHS is taking to protect patients.

What happened?

On Oct. 5, 2015, a community member found cardboard boxes containing health information for approximately 470 patients of the Northern Navajo Medical Center at a public rental storage facility in Waterflow, N.M. The community member contacted the Northern Navajo Medical Center in Shiprock and IHS employees immediately retrieved the material and contacted authorities to investigate.

The Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General Investigator discovered that a medical center employee had taken documents used for patient registration without authorization from the medical center and stored them with personal items in the public storage facility. As the investigation proceeded, documents related to an additional 7,000 individuals were also found in the employee's possession, bringing the total impacted to approximately 7,500 individuals. All documents have been retrieved from the storage units and returned to the medical center. At this time IHS has not received any indication that the information has been accessed or used by any unauthorized individuals.

What is IHS doing to protect patient information?

Notification letters have been sent by first class mail to all affected individuals, and the IHS has reached out to tribal leaders and chapter houses in the area to share information with members of the community.

As a measure of added security, IHS is offering free identity theft protection services to the individuals who are impacted and strongly encourages them to register. To enroll, affected individuals can visit www.idexpertscorp.com/protect, or call 1-866-329-9984 and provide the membership code that can be found on the letter they received.

The 12 month credit monitoring and recovery services include:

- Tri-Bureau Credit Monitoring - Monitors any changes reported by Experian, Equifax and TransUnion credit bureaus to your credit report.
- CyberScan Monitoring - Monitors criminal websites, chat rooms, and bulletin boards for illegal selling or trading of personal information.
- ID Monitoring - Monitors public records databases, looking for names and addresses affiliated with your Social Security number.
- Access to the ID Experts Team - Access to an online resource center for up-to-date information on new identity theft scams, tips for protection, legislative updates and other topics associated with maintaining the health of your identity.

- Complete Recovery Services - Should you believe that you are a victim of identity theft, ID Experts will work with you to assess, stop, and reverse identity theft issues.
- Identity Theft Insurance - In the event of a confirmed identity theft, you may be eligible for reimbursement of up to \$1,000,000 for expenses related to that theft.
- Credit Report - The membership also includes a tri-bureau credit report.

Medical Center patients who have any questions can contact Gary Russell-King, the Navajo Area HIPAA coordinator, at (505) 386-6032 or gary.russell-king@ihs.gov.

IHS takes patient privacy very seriously and in light of this incident, has reviewed and updated policies and procedures and provided additional training to help prevent future incidents. IHS is also providing face-to-face privacy training for all department staff, to include records management responsibilities and requirements on maintaining government documents.