

# Patient Confidentiality & Disease Reporting

## **PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCIES ARE EXEMPT FROM HIPAA**

Many healthcare professionals remain unsure of the legality of disease reporting in light of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996. Congress established the HIPAA regulations to safeguard personal medical information from inappropriate disclosures and misuse. Full implementation was mandated in April 2003.

While much has been written about HIPAA and Public Health, healthcare providers continue to question the legality of disease reporting without obtaining prior patient consent. HIPAA privacy regulations do not prevent sharing information with public health officials. **In fact, HIPAA regulations contain specific language permitting reports to public health agencies of disease conditions as listed in state public health laws and regulations.** Patient authorization is not required when healthcare professionals or laboratory workers suspect or diagnose a disease of public health importance. (Public Health exemptions can be found at: [www.hhs.gov/ocr/hipaa](http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/hipaa) Section 164.512b).