

# Health Information Compliance Alert

## Clip and Save: Tackle Patient SSN Concerns With a Handy Information Sheet

**Providing concrete information may help ease patient worries.**

While experts recommend that you only collect patient social security numbers (SSNs) when absolutely necessary, there may be times you either need to collect or want to collect the information. You can help your patients stay informed of your policy and state or Federal SSN collection regulations with a document like this one from **Marcia Carroll**, an office manager and billing supervisor in Colorado Springs.

### **Social Security Numbers**

To process insurance claims, {Practice Name} requires the social security number of the insured as well as the responsible party. A patient who does not want to give their social security number but still wishes to be seen by {Practice Name} must pay for the entire visit up front.

State of Colorado:

[www.coloradoattorneygeneral.gov/initiatives/identity\\_theft/social\\_security\\_numbers](http://www.coloradoattorneygeneral.gov/initiatives/identity_theft/social_security_numbers)

### **Requests by businesses**

Federal law does not prohibit a merchant or other business from requesting your SSN. However, there is no state or federal law that requires you to provide your SSN to any entity not authorized by law to require it. Businesses, private agencies, etc. are free to request your SSN and use it for any purpose that does not violate state or federal law.

For example, retail stores, prospective landlords, prospective employers, utility companies, and other service providers often ask you your SSN, but they do not need to and you are not required to give it. They can do a credit check or ID their customers by alternative means. Remember that you are under no obligation to provide your SSN to any merchant or other business. However, that merchant or other business is free to decline your business if you refuse to disclose your SSN.

Social Security Administration:

[http://ssa-custhelp.ssa.gov/app/answers/detail/a\\_id/78/~/legal-requirements-to-provide-your-ssn](http://ssa-custhelp.ssa.gov/app/answers/detail/a_id/78/~/legal-requirements-to-provide-your-ssn)

If a business or other enterprise asks you for your SSN, you can refuse to give it. However, that may mean doing without the purchase or service for which your number was requested. For example, utility companies and other services ask for an SSN, but do not need it; they can do a credit check or identify the person in their records by alternative means.