

Health Information Compliance Alert

Reader Questions: Does Bluetooth Endanger HIPAA Security On Mobile Devices?

Question: Our clinicians use smartphones and tablets. Some of these devices have Bluetooth capability. Is this a security risk?

Answer: Bluetooth is a short-range radio frequency communication. The best way to secure mobile devices with Bluetooth capabilities is to turn off or set the Bluetooth connection capabilities to "nondiscoverable," according to the **HHS Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology** (ONC).

"When in discoverable mode, Bluetooth-enabled mobile devices are 'visible' to other nearby devices, which may alert a hacker to target them," ONC explains. But when you turn off Bluetooth or put it into nondiscoverable mode, the Bluetooth devices become invisible to other devices.

Resource: For more on Bluetooth, see the **National Institute of Standards and Technology's** Guide to Bluetooth Security (SP 800-121 Rev. 1) at www.nist.gov/customcf/get_pdf.cfm?pub_id=911133.