

Health Information Compliance Alert

Reader Questions: Mass E-mails Aren't No-Nos

Question: We would like to send a quarterly e-mail newsletter to our patients who have provided us with their e-mail addresses. Would we be violating the privacy or security rules if we sent these messages as a mass e-mail? Must we send the e-newsletters to each patient individually?

Vermont Subscriber

Answer: You don't have to send the e-mails individually, says **Debbie Larios**, an attorney with Miller & Martin in Nashville. But you also can't disclose each patient's name and e-mail address.

Do this: Use your e-mail application's 'blind carbon copy' (BCC) feature to mask patients' e-mail addresses, security experts suggest. Or you can purchase an application to hide the addresses from inappropriate view.

The bottom line: Neither the privacy rule nor the security rule forbid you from sending a mass e-mail, Larios says. However, you must protect the names and addresses of your recipients.