

(1) **What is HIPAA?**

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) was passed by Congress in 1996 to:

- insure the portability of insurance coverage as employees moved from job to job
- increase accountability and decrease fraud and abuse in health care; and
- improve the efficiency of the health care payment process, while at the same time protecting a patient's privacy.

HIPAA applies to "Covered Entities," defined by the Privacy Rule as

- a health care provider that conducts certain transactions in electronic form,
- a health care clearinghouse,
- a health plan, or
- a business associate (person or organization performing a function on behalf of the CE for which access to protected health information is needed).

Because the University of Alabama has at least one department that provides health care services and electronically transmits health information, it is considered a Covered Entity.

(2) **UA as a "hybrid entity"**

Since the primary function of The University is not to provide health care, UA is permitted to designate itself as a "hybrid entity," which allows it to apply the Privacy Rule only to those parts of UA that, if standing alone, would be a Covered Entity. As a hybrid entity, UA must designate its "health care components," which includes departments that provide support for health care components.

Health Care Components at the University of Alabama are:

- The Brewer Porch Children's Center
- The University Medical Center
- The Capstone Rural Health Center
- The Russell Student Health Center
- The Speech & Hearing Clinic

(3) **HIPAA and Research**

A researcher who obtains protected health information from a Covered Entity (whether at UA or from some other Covered Entity), the research will need to comply to HIPAA research guidelines, working through the Institutional Review Board.

- The Impact of the HIPAA Privacy Rule on Research at The University of Alabama. (link to document)
- UA Power Point presentation on HIPAA and Research (separate documents)
- HIPAA Research Decision Tree (print from link)