

# Medical Records

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# What are medical records?



**Medical records are documents that describe your personal health history. Medical records can include:**

- › Notes your healthcare providers make at any routine exams or visits, including routine vitals like height, weight, blood pressure, laboratory tests, or conversations you had with them.
- › Any vaccines or immunizations you've received, like the flu vaccine.
- › Any medicine that a doctor has given you through a prescription like antibiotics or birth control.
- › A record of any medical procedures you've had, like surgeries or x-rays.
- › Secure messages, emails, or notes on phone calls between you and your provider.

**Medical records are confidential records that can only be accessed by a select group of healthcare providers that are supporting your care.**

**While your medical records may include any of these elements, there are a few things your medical records MUST have:**

- › your full name as it appears on your legal documents like a drivers license, passport, or visa.
- › proof of any legal name change.
- › your date of birth.
- › a stamp or signature from your previous healthcare providers.
- › For Columbia Health, an English translation if they're in another language.

## How is my privacy protected?

At Columbia Health, your **protected health information (PHI)** is stored in a secure EHR. Only Columbia Health staff have access to these systems - no other employees of the University can access them.

When you have an appointment at Columbia Health, staff will request your UNI and other identifiers (like date of birth or local address) when accessing your chart to confirm identity.

*These protections are all a part of the Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act (HIPAA) and the Family Education Rights & Privacy Act (FERPA).*

# What are HIPAA & FERPA? How do they protect my health information?



**The Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act, or HIPAA, helps to ensure the privacy and security of your health information, commonly called protected health information (PHI).**

There are three main parts to HIPAA that protect your information:

- The **Privacy Rule** gives you access to your own medical records and limits who else can access them.
- The **Security Rule** states your electronic health information must be stored in secure locations online or as physical copies.
- The **Breach Notification Rule** requires your healthcare providers or insurance company to notify you if your medical records are accessed by an unauthorized person.

HIPAA applies to all healthcare providers, your insurance company, and anyone else with necessary access to your medical records. You can learn more about HIPAA on the [HIPAA for Individuals](#) page of the [US Department of Health & Human Services](#) website.



**The Family Education Rights & Privacy Act, or FERPA, protects the health information of students treated at a student health facility on a university or college campus.**

FERPA has guidelines like HIPAA to protect your records. It also ensures that student health information isn't shared with people outside of the healthcare center – even with other University employees or administrators.

FERPA provides protections to personal records of anyone enrolled at a college or university in the United States. Under FERPA, your medical records are considered treatment records.

You can learn more about FERPA through the [US Department of Education website](#).



# Is Columbia Health covered under HIPAA?

**Yes! Columbia Health follows the requirements of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), as applicable.**

FERPA governs all Columbia University, Jewish Theological, Union Theological, and Teachers College students seeking care at Columbia Health. For any dependents of students who are on the student health insurance plan, their records are governed under HIPAA. Both laws have similar practices to protect information and ensure confidentiality.



You can learn more about the [intersection of FERPA & HIPAA at post-secondary institutions](#) on the US Department of Health & Human Services website. Or check out the [notice of privacy practices](#) on the Columbia Health website.



# Who can access my medical records?

**Your medical records are confidential – the only people that can access them are you and the healthcare professionals that support you.**

Other people can access your medical records if you grant them permission. This might include your immediate family members, legal guardians, medical proxies, or those with power of attorney.



**When you're seeing a new healthcare provider, they may want your official medical records.**

- If they work in the same office or provider network, they may be able to view your medical history through a shared electronic health record (EHR).
- If it's a new practice, you may need to request that your previous provider share your records with your new provider.

**At Columbia Health, any Columbia Health provider can see your health history. Columbia Health uses a shared electronic health record and operates under the same confidentiality, privacy agreements, and laws. However, only providers participating in your care will look at or review your records.**

# How are medical records stored?

Federal law requires healthcare providers to store all medical and treatment records in secure ways. Physical paper copies must be locked in a secure space. Digital records must be stored in a secure electronic health record (EHR).

An EHR is a type of software that protects your medical records and other health-related documents. EHRs may also be called electronic medical records (EMRs). These terms may be used interchangeably, but the formal definitions are:

An **electronic medical record (EMR)** is maintained by a specific medical provider, like in a private practice.



An **electronic health record (EHR)** allows a group of healthcare providers, like in a hospital or health center, to securely share information about their patients.



**All information in any EHR and EMR is encrypted so that it's unreadable to those without access to it.**

## How can I request my medical records?

You can contact your healthcare providers to request a copy of your medical records directly. Some may require an email or phone request. Depending on their systems, you may be able to download a copy directly from an online portal or app.

You may need to sign a release form before your former provider shares your medical records with other providers. This is often called an **authorization for the release of health information**.

Many US states have laws around how long a healthcare provider must keep medical records. New York State providers are required to maintain records for at least six years. However, many offices keep records for longer. If you'd like to access an older medical record, you can contact the office to see what they still have on file.



# How can I transfer my medical records to a new provider?

Your healthcare provider may specify the ways they'd like your records transferred to them. If they don't, contact them to learn more about how they handle incoming records. Some of the ways may include:



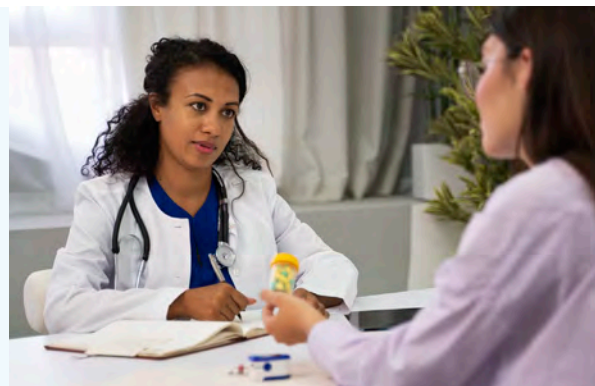
Your new provider may contact your former provider directly. In this case, your former provider will email, fax, or mail a copy of your records to the new provider. You may need to sign a form that allows them to be transferred.



You may bring a physical copy to the office, email them to your new provider, or upload them to an online portal ahead of your appointment.



You may be able to provide a verbal health history. At many appointments, they'll ask about allergies, current prescriptions, and family history, even if it's in your medical record.



**New York State & Columbia University requires students to upload proof of immunization. You can view the [Immunization Compliance page](#) on the Columbia health website for instructions on how to upload these records and commonly asked questions.**

# How can I keep track of my medical records?

**Your medical records contain important information about you, your body, and your health. Keeping your medical records in a safe and private place ensures that you have the information when you need it.**



## **Some strategies to keep your medical records full and secure include:**

- Request your medical records as soon as you are no longer seeing a particular healthcare provider so you don't forget. If you forget, you can always contact the office to request a copy.
- Have them in a password protected folder on your personal computer or uploaded to your personal cloud.
- Have physical copies kept in a locked drawer or other secure space in your home, apartment, or residence hall room.
- Make sure your emergency contact has copies of the most essential information – including allergies, current medications, family history, etc.
- Keep a card in your wallet, purse, or backpack with any medication allergies, key contact information, or chronic health conditions.

# Can my family members access my medical records?

**At Columbia University, parents and family members don't have access to FERPA records, including student treatment records. Some schools have protocols that grant parental or legal guardian access to student records. If you want them to have access to your medical records, you can reach out to your academic advisor.**

If you keep copies of your medical records, you can share them directly with family members. However, a healthcare provider can only discuss your records with them if they have completed the appropriate disclosure forms.

# When should I share my complete medical record with a new provider?

**If you're seeing someone who will be providing care long-term, you may want to share full records with them from the beginning. If you're seeing someone short-term, such as urgent care, you may only share a partial history.**

Regardless of the situation, you should share the medicine you take, any allergies you have, or family history of health conditions with your healthcare provider. This helps inform the work they're doing and ensure you get appropriate support.



**Students who plan on accessing Columbia Health for medical care should upload records to the [online patient portal](#)**

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