



**Health Services**  
LOS ANGELES COUNTY

# POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

**SUBJECT:** RETENTION OF MEDICAL RECORDS AND X-RAY FILMS

**POLICY NO:** 881

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**PURPOSE:**

To establish the Department of Health Services' policy on the retention and destruction of medical records and x-rays.

**POLICY:**

**I. RETENTION PERIOD FOR PAPER MEDICAL RECORDS**

- Adult patients, 7 years following discharge/treatment.
- Minor patients, at least one year after such minor has attained the age of 18, but in no event less than 7 years following discharge/treatment.
- Obstetrical records, as long as the record of the child are retained, at least 19 years.
- Fetal monitoring strips, 19 years following discharge.
- Medical records involved in civil or criminal litigation or regulatory activities, shall be maintained until DHS legal counsel determines the medical records may be destroyed.
- The facility must obtain Department of Health Services' Chief Financial Officer approval to maintain medical records beyond the retention period. Approval will be based on the availability of the requestor to clearly indicate revenue generation (from research grant funds, etc.) to pay for extra maintenance costs.
- Medical records involved in financial audits shall be maintained until DHS' Chief Financial Officer determines they may be destroyed.
- Destruction of records shall be approved by the facility's Chief Financial Officer prior to destruction to ensure there are no outstanding audits. Destruction of

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**APPROVED BY:**  
**REVIEW DATES:**

**EFFECTIVE DATE:** May 1, 2007  
**SUPERSEDES:** August 1, 1989

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records shall be consistent with DHS policies and procedures for destruction of protected health information.

- Paper records that have been scanned and are available online in digital format and part of the facility's electronic medical record (EMR) shall be retained for no more than one (1) year from the date of scanning or as determined by DHS legal counsel.

## II. RETENTION PERIOD FOR ELECTRONIC RECORDS

- Adult patients, 7 years following discharge/treatment.
- Minor patient, at least one year after such minor has attained the age of 18, but in no event less than 7 years following discharge/treatment.
- Obstetrical records, as long as the record of the child are retained, at least 19 years.
- Medical records involved in civil or criminal litigation or regulatory activities, shall be maintained until DHS legal counsel feels they may be destroyed.
- The facility must obtain Department of Health Services' approval to maintain medical records beyond the retention period. Approval will be based on the ability of the requestor to clearly indicate revenue generation (from research grant funds, etc.) to pay for extra maintenance costs.
- Destruction of records shall be approved by the facility's Chief Financial Officer prior to destruction to ensure there are no outstanding audits. Destruction shall be consistent with DHS policies and procedures for destruction of protected health information.

## III. X-RAY FILMS RETENTION PERIOD

- Adult patients, 7 years following discharge/treatment.
  - Minor patients, at least one year after such minor has attained the age of 18, but in no event less than 7 years following discharge/treatment.
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- X-ray films involved in civil litigation or regulatory activities shall be maintained until DHS legal counsel determines the records may be destroyed. Destruction shall be consistent with DHS policies and procedures for destruction of x-ray film.

## **IV. MICROFILM RETENTION PERIOD**

- Microfilm copies of medical records shall be maintained no more than 20 years from the date of filming.

### **DEFINITIONS:**

1. Retention Period: The total time a record is kept.
2. Disposition: The action which accomplishes the preservation, storage, and disposal of records.
3. Disposal: The elimination of records by destruction.

### **GUIDELINES:**

#### RETENTION PERIOD CONSIDERATIONS

1. Space constraints: The space available will determine whether the healthcare facility will purge a record after 7 years or whether it will request approval to retain the record for a longer period of time.
2. Frequency of use: Healthcare facilities should consider how often records are used in deciding to exceed the 7 year retention period.
3. Historical or research use: Consideration should be given to space, cost and personnel when retaining medical records for historical or research use.

### **AUTHORITY:**

1. Title 22, California Code of Regulations, Section 70751 and 71551 establish the following minimum standards:

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- Patients' records including x-ray films or reproductions thereof, must be preserved for a minimum of seven years following discharge of the patient, except that the records of unemancipated minors must be kept at least one year after such minor has reached the age of 18 years and, in any case, not less than seven years.
  - If a hospital ceases operation, arrangement must be made within 48 hours for the transfer and safe preservation of medical records for the time period required by the regulations.
2. A Guide to Hospital Record Retention – Published by California Association of Hospitals and Health Systems (CAHHS).
- Health facilities should retain the medical records of pregnant women for as long as they keep the records of their children, for at least 19 years.

**CROSS REFERENCE:**

DHS Policy 390.3, Protecting Health Information after Facility Closure

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