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The Hidden National Health Surveillance System

A national health monitoring program began shortly after 9/11. Called the National Syndromic Surveillance Program, it collects, shares, analyzes and exchanges certain patient data all year long. More than 4,000 health care facilities in 45 states and Washington D.C. send real-time data from emergency rooms and other sources. HIPAA permits it because HIPAA's purpose is data-sharing, not privacy protection.

Syndromic surveillance tracks symptoms such as respiratory distress, fever and vomiting—before a diagnosis is confirmed. This real-time data is monitored daily, without patient consent. And even though it's unconstitutional, the federal HIPAA rule allows it. Syndromic surveillance is only prohibited in states that have strong patient consent laws.

“National Syndromic Surveillance Program (NSSP): BioSense Platform,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Accessed May 14, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2AxNBPT>

“Project—Connecting Real Time Data,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Accessed May 14, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3e1fjDd>

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