



**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**  
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**Department of Public Health**  
**Bureau of Health Care Safety and Quality**  
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**Circular Letter: DHCQ 08-12-502**

**TO: Chief Executive Officers**  
**Acute Care Hospitals**  
**Public Health Hospitals**

**FROM: Paul Dreyer, Ph.D.**  
**Bureau Director**

**DATE: December 12, 2008**

**RE: Healthcare Associated Infections - Additional Reporting Guidelines**

The intent of this letter is to inform you that the Department of Public Health (DPH) has expanded its guidelines for the reporting of HAI related information. DPH will now require that all acute care and public health hospitals give DPH and Betsy Lehman Center for the Prevention of Medical Errors (BLC) access to age and gender data that you are currently entering in the National Healthcare Safety Network (NHSN). Additionally, DPH will now require that hospitals report and grant similar access to race and ethnicity data.

The process for granting access to this demographic data is done by conferring rights, but for demographics you “confer rights with identifiers”. The identifiers that DPH will now require include age, gender, race and ethnicity. The data will continue to be reported through the National Healthcare Safety Network (NHSN).

Granting access to the demographics contributes to a more comprehensive analysis of the data. By being able to stratify the infection data by gender and age, we will be able to assess whether infections have any correlation to the age and/or gender of patients. The race and ethnicity data will help us to assess for potential disparities among detailed race and ethnicity subgroups in a manner consistent with current DPH standards. The demographics are protected information and will only be released to the public in the aggregate.

JSI, Inc. is conducting a training session on December 16, 2008, which will explain how to “confer rights with identifiers”. The training will walk you through the process so that you can become familiar with the fields that you need to complete. The age and gender data are required fields within NHSN.

However, because Massachusetts's now uses an expanded list of codes for race and ethnicity, JSI, Inc. has created a plan for using NHSN's custom fields to capture this data. The training will cover how to use the custom fields. JSI will send written materials in advance of the training. The materials will then be posted on the DPH website ([www.mass.gov/dph/dhcq](http://www.mass.gov/dph/dhcq)) and the BLC website ([www.mass.gov/dph/betsylehman](http://www.mass.gov/dph/betsylehman)).

Conferring of rights with identifiers will need to be completed by January 1, 2009.

If you have any questions about these requirements, please call or write Eileen McHale at [eileen.mchale@state.ma.us](mailto:eileen.mchale@state.ma.us) or 617-624-5723 or Roberta Bernstein at [roberta.bernstein@state.ma.us](mailto:roberta.bernstein@state.ma.us) or 617-753-8062.