

Timescales

Data protection principles state that information must not be retained longer than needed for purpose (General Data Protection Regulation (Rec 39 Art 5)) and protects the rights for the individual to request their personal data is erased (Art 17) under certain circumstances, although the right to erasure is usually not applicable to health records.

Retention schedules for health records may be specified in your employer’s local policies and guidance on record management. The retention schedules defined in the [Records Management Code of Practice for Health and Social Care Records \(2016\)](#) Appendix 3 are considered best practice in the absence of local policies. A summary is provided here. Please refer to the original document for full details.

Care Records

Record Type	Retention starts	Retention period	Action at end of retention	Notes
Adult Health	Discharge or patient last seen	8 years	Review and if no longer needed destroy	Includes X-rays, scans, video and other formats
Adult Social Care	End of care or date last seen	8 years	Review and if no longer needed destroy	
Children’s Records	Discharge or patient last seen	25th or 26th birthday	Review and if no longer needed destroy	26th Birthday applies if patient 17 at conclusion of treatment. Includes X-rays, scans, video and other formats
Electronic Patient Records			Once records have reached the end of their retention period they	Retention periods same as for paper. Some electronic systems may do this automatically. Otherwise the record should be made inaccessible to users of the

Record Type	Retention starts	Retention period	Action at end of retention	Notes
			should be destroyed.	system. A log or 'meta data stub' should be kept of records destroyed.
Mental Health Records	Discharge or patient last seen	20 years or 8 years after death	Review and if no longer needed destroy	Covers records made where the person has been cared for under the Mental Health Act 1983 as amended by the Mental Health Act 2007. This includes psychology records. Retention solely for any persons who have been sectioned under the Mental Health Act 1983 must be considerably longer than 20 years where the case may be ongoing. Very mild forms of adult mental health treated in a community setting where a full recovery is made may consider treating as an adult records and keep for 8 years after discharge. All must be reviewed prior to destruction taking into account any serious incident retentions.
Record of long term illness or an illness that may reoccur	Discharge or patient last seen	30 years or 8 years after the patient has died	Review and if no longer needed destroy	Necessary for continuity of clinical care. The primary record of the illness and course of treatment must be kept of a patient where the illness may re-occur or is a life long illness.

Event and Transaction Records

Record Type	Retention starts	Retention period	Action at end of retention	Notes
Clinical Audit	Creation	5 years	Review and if no longer needed destroy	
Clinical Diaries	End of the year to which they relate	2 years	Review and if no longer needed destroy	Diaries of clinical activity & visits must be written up and transferred to the main patient file. If this information is not transferred retain diary for 8 years.
Clinical Protocols	Creation	25 years	Review and consider transfer to place of deposit.	Clinical protocols may have archival value. They may also be routinely captured in clinical governance meetings which may form part of the permanent record (see Corporate Records).
Equipment Maintenance logs	Decommissioning of the equipment	11 years	Review and if no longer needed destroy	
Referrals not accepted	Date of rejection	2 years as an ephemeral record	Review and if no longer needed destroy	
Ward handover sheet	Date of handover	2 years	Review and if no longer needed destroy	This retention refers to the ward. Individual staff sheets must be confidentiality destroyed at end of each shift.

Clinical Trials and Research

Record Type	Retention starts	Retention period	Action at end of retention	Notes
Research data sets	Closure of research	Not more than 20 years	Review and consider transfer to place of deposit.	
Research Ethics Committee documentation for research proposal	End of research	5 years	Review and consider transfer to place of deposit.	
Research Ethics Committee minutes and papers	Year to which they relate	Before 20 years	Research Ethics Committee documentation	Committee papers must be transferred to a place of deposit as a public record.

Corporate Governance

Record Type	Retention starts	Retention period	Action at end of retention	Notes
Board Meetings	Creation	Before 20 years/ as soon as practical	Transfer to a place of deposit	
Board Meeting (Closed Boards)	Creation	Up to 20 years	Transfer to a place of deposit	Although they may contain confidential or sensitive material they are still a public record and must be transferred at 20 years with any FOI exemptions noted or duty of

Record Type	Retention starts	Retention period	Action at end of retention	Notes
				confidence indicated.
Committees/ Groups/ sub committees not listed in the scheme of delegation	Creation	6 years	Review and if no longer needed destroy	Includes minor meetings/ projects/ departmental business meetings
Destruction Certificates or Electronic Metadata destruction stub or record of information held on destroyed physical media	Destruction of record or information	20 years	Consider transfer to a place of deposit and no longer needed destroy	
Incidents	Date of incident	20 years (serious) 10 years (non serious)	Review and consider transfer to place of deposit.	
Policies/ strategies/ operating procedures/ business plans	Creation	Life of organisation + 6 years	Review and consider transfer to place of deposit.	

Communications

Record Type	Retention starts	Retention period	Action at end of retention	Notes
Intranet site	Creation	6 years	Review and consider transfer to place of deposit.	
Patient information leaflets	End of use	6 years	Review and consider transfer to place of deposit.	
Press releases and internal communications	Release date	6 years	Review and consider transfer to place of deposit.	
Website	Creation	6 years	Review and consider transfer to place of deposit.	

Staff Records

Record Type	Retention starts	Retention period	Action at end of retention	Notes
Exposure monitoring information	Monitoring ceases	40 years/ 5 years from date of last entry		A) Where the record is representative of the personal exposures of identifiable employees, for at least 40 years or B) In any other case, for at least 5 years
Occupational Health Reports	Staff member leaves	6 years or until 75th Birthday	Review and if no longer needed destroy	75 years for staff member under surveillance
Staff training records	Creation	6 years or until 75th Birthday	Review and if no longer needed destroy	10 years for statutory/ mandatory training.

Finance

Record Type	Retention starts	Retention period	Action at end of retention	Notes
Accounts	Close of financial year	3 years	Review and if no longer needed destroy	
Donations	Close of financial year	6 years	Review and if no longer needed destroy	
Expenses	Close of financial year	6 years	Review and if no longer needed destroy	

Record Type	Retention starts	Retention period	Action at end of retention	Notes
Petty Cash	Close of financial year	2 years	Review and if no longer needed destroy	
Salaries paid to staff	Close of financial year	10 years	Review and if no longer needed destroy	

Legal, Complaints and information rights

Record Type	Retention starts	Retention period	Action at end of retention	Notes
Complaints case file	Closure of incident	10 years	Review and if no longer needed destroy	http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/information-management/sched_complaints.pdf The incident is not closed until all subsequent processes have ceased including litigation. The file must not be kept on the patient file. A separate file must always be maintained.
Freedom information requests/ responses	Closure of FOI request	3 years (6 years if after subsequent appeal)	Review and if no longer needed destroy	
Litigation records	Closure of case	10 years	Review and consider transfer to place of	

Record Type	Retention starts	Retention period	Action at end of retention	Notes
			deposit.	
Subject Access Requests	Closure of SAR	3 years (6 years if after subsequent appeal)	Review and if no longer needed destroy	

Other relevant guidance includes:

- Department of Education (2013) [Disposal of school records](#) Northern Ireland
- Gov.UK (2018) [Record Retention and Disposition Schedules](#) Ministry of Justice
- IRMS (2016) [Record Management Toolkit for Schools](#)

Due to recent changes in data protection legislation you should be aware information may still be under review.

Speech and language therapists should always refer to their employer’s local policies and guidance on record retention and disposal, where available.