

# Insurer aetna's envelopes revealed customers' HIV status

August 30 2017

---



(HealthDay)—Customers of health insurance giant Aetna in many states

were sent mail with envelopes that clearly revealed their HIV status, says the Legal Action Center and AIDS Law Project of Pennsylvania.

In partnership with six other groups, the two legal organizations are representing the affected customers, who say friends and neighbors discovered their HIV status in this way, the firms said in a news release. On Thursday, lawyers sent Aetna a demand letter requesting that they cease sending mail in this format, *CNN* reported. The mail went to an estimated 12,000 customers, the law firms said, and 23 complaints have so far been received. The Aetna letters were sent July 28 to customers taking HIV medications or drugs meant to prevent infection with the virus that causes AIDS, the legal groups said.

On July 31, the insurance company became aware that private health information was clearly visible through the envelopes' windows, according to a "notification of privacy breach" letter sent to customers. In that notification, Aetna claimed that the vendor that handled the mail used a windowed envelope, and in some cases the paper inside shifted to make personal health information viewable.

So far, patients in Arizona, California, Georgia, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C., have reached out to lawyers, *CNN* said. "I know of someone who has been kicked out of his home because somebody who saw his envelope learned his HIV status," Sally Friedman, legal director of the Legal Action Center, told *CNN*. "People with HIV need to feel they can seek medical help without their private information being illegally shared with neighbors, family, etc.," Friedman added. "So, when an insurance company breaches confidentiality in this fashion, it can deter people from getting [health care](#)."

**More information:** [More Information](#)

Copyright © 2017 [HealthDay](#). All rights reserved.

Citation: Insurer aetna's envelopes revealed customers' HIV status (2017, August 30) retrieved 27 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-08-aetna-envelopes-revealed-customers-hiv.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.