

Lesson **1**

WHEN HHS REGULATIONS APPLY



OASH

Office for
Human Research
Protections



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Overview

Purpose of this Lesson

This lesson will introduce you to the Common Rule and the offices and agencies that are responsible for the regulatory oversight of human subjects research. **This lesson focuses on the Revised Common Rule (or 2018 Requirements) that became effective in 2018.**

Lesson Overview

This lesson contains four parts:

- **Part 1:** Protecting People in Research
- **Part 2:** The Common Rule
- **Part 3:** HHS Offices and Agencies
- **Part 4:** Regulations and Institutional Policies

Learning Objectives

After completing this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Identify the central ethical principles for protecting human research subjects.
2. Provide an overview of the Common Rule.
3. Describe the responsibilities of the HHS Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and other HHS offices and agencies.
4. Understand the relationship between the regulations and institutional policies.

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Part 1: Protecting People in Research

Introduction

We encourage scientific research because all members of society stand to benefit from:

- A better understanding of human biology and behavior;
- New ways to improve health; and
- Better treatments or social programs.



But in order for this to happen, the research community must earn and maintain the public's trust. One way the research community accomplishes this is by following ethical guidelines and adhering to applicable research regulations.

Much of the biomedical and behavioral research that seeks to benefit individuals in our society involves human subjects – those individuals who participate in the research. Without them, the research couldn't happen.

The Belmont Report

The U.S. has regulations to protect research subjects that are based on a core set of ethical principles. Three principles—**respect for persons, beneficence, and justice**—were identified and explained in the 1979 [Belmont Report](#).

THE BELMONT REPORT

Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research

The *Belmont Report* was written by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research. The Commission, created as a result of the National Research Act of 1974, was charged with identifying the basic ethical principles that should underlie the conduct of biomedical and behavioral research involving human subjects and developing guidelines to assure that such research is conducted in accordance with those principles. Informed by monthly discussions that spanned nearly four years and an intensive four days of deliberation in 1976, the Commission published the *Belmont Report*, which identifies basic ethical principles and guidelines that address ethical issues arising from the conduct of research with human subjects.



READ THE BELMONT REPORT

Read the full text of the *Belmont Report*



WATCH A VIDEO ABOUT THE BELMONT REPORT

This video describes the basic ethical principles that underlie research involving human subjects and demonstrates how they can help resolve ethical conflicts in research.



VIEW 25th ANNIVERSARY INTERVIEWS

This collection of videos includes interviews with members and staff of the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research from the 25th anniversary of publication in 2004.



READ OTHER REPORTS BY THE NATIONAL COMMISSION

Explore a compilation of related reports published by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research between 1974 and 1978.

 Protecting Human Subjects of Research

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These Belmont Principles became the ethical foundation of the first comprehensive set of Federal regulations to protect human subjects in research, enacted shortly after the Belmont Report was published.

While the regulations have been updated since that time, their ethical foundation remains the same.

The principle of respect for persons acknowledges that individuals make decisions about how they want to live their lives, including if they want to volunteer for research studies. The primary goal of research is to develop generalizable knowledge and not necessarily to further the individual interests of research participants. An important way the regulations support the ethical principle of respect for persons in research is, with some exceptions, the requirement for investigators to seek informed consent from prospective participants (or their legal representatives) before involving them in research. Apart from certain specific information about the research study, investigators must also provide information that a reasonable person would want to have to make an informed decision about whether to participate. Hence, it's imperative that investigators strive to understand prospective participants and their perspectives to satisfy this requirement and fulfill the investigators' ethical responsibility.

The principle of beneficence acknowledges that research could bring about important contributions to public good. It calls for attention to the significance of the knowledge that may be gained from the research that the investigators propose. Investigators should conduct research in a way that would not only maximize the benefits for all but also minimize the risks to individual participants. Separately, the regulations also require that the risks the research poses to participants are reasonable in relation to the overall anticipated benefits.

Finally, **the principle of justice** is concerned with the fair distribution of burdens and benefits. Investigators should strive for an equitable selection of subjects to participate in the research. This means they should maximize the inclusion of those individuals who would most likely benefit from the knowledge that may result, paying particular attention to those who may be under-represented in research.

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For more information on the Belmont Report, go to: <https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/belmont-report/index.html>.

Part 2: The Common Rule

Overview of the Common Rule

The first Federal human subjects protection regulations were created in response to concerns about how some medical research was being conducted at the time. Since this research was primarily health-related, the Federal Health Department (what is now the Department of Health and Human Services, or HHS) oversaw the development of the regulations.

Currently, the **HHS Office for Human Research Protections (or OHRP)** is responsible for oversight of these regulations for HHS. The HHS regulations, which can be found in the Code of Federal Regulations at 45 CFR Part 46, provide basic protections for people who participate in research that comes under HHS's purview.



There are five subparts to these regulations.

- Subpart A establishes basic protections for research subjects generally.
- Subparts B, C, and D provide additional protections for certain vulnerable groups in research.
- Subpart E establishes requirements for registration of institutional review boards (IRBs).

Subpart A of the regulations is referred to as the **Common Rule** because many other Federal departments and agencies have also adopted it to protect participants in the research they conduct or fund.

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The Common Rule provides a broad set of [protections for research subjects](#). These protections include review and approval of research protocols by IRBs and requirements for informed consent and privacy and confidentiality protection, among others.

Check out our infographics to find out how the regulations protect research participants: <https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/education-and-outreach/about-research-participation/protecting-research-volunteers/index.html>.

Common Rule Videos

Find out more about IRBs and informed consent by watching these short videos.

Video 1

[How IRBs Protect Human Research Participants](#)



Video 2

[Informed Consent for Research: What to Expect](#)



Protecting Research Volunteers

Why Have Regulations to Protect Research Participants?

The regulations we have to protect people in research came about after a *series of events* in the twentieth century in which doctors and scientists abused the trust that society placed in them.

Examples of Unethical Research in the Past

1946 The **Nuremberg Doctors' Trial**, in 1946, was an international military tribunal that tried and convicted Nazi doctors who conducted horrific unethical experiments on concentration camp prisoners during the Holocaust. It resulted in the **Nuremberg Code**, a set of international ethical guidelines for conducting research with humans.

There also were examples of research with questionable ethics going on in the United States. In **1966**, **Henry Beecher**, an anesthesiologist and researcher, published a widely cited *New England Journal of Medicine* article (1966, vol. 274, p.1354-1360) detailing numerous examples of unethical experiments involving human subjects that were conducted at various U.S. institutions.

1972 In 1972, there was widespread media coverage of the **Syphilis Study in Tuskegee, Alabama**. Beginning in the 1930s and continuing for decades, U.S. government doctors studied the progression of untreated syphilis in poor African American men. The doctors did not tell the men they had syphilis, prevented them from learning their diagnosis, and did not offer treatment, even after penicillin became available.

All of which resulted in

The Need for Rules to Protect Research Participants

As a result of the public outcry from publicized cases of unethical research, Congress passed a law requiring **federal rules to protect people who participate in research**. The rules rely on ethical principles that were laid out in the **Belmont Report**, which was written by an advisory committee created by Congress and published in **1979**.

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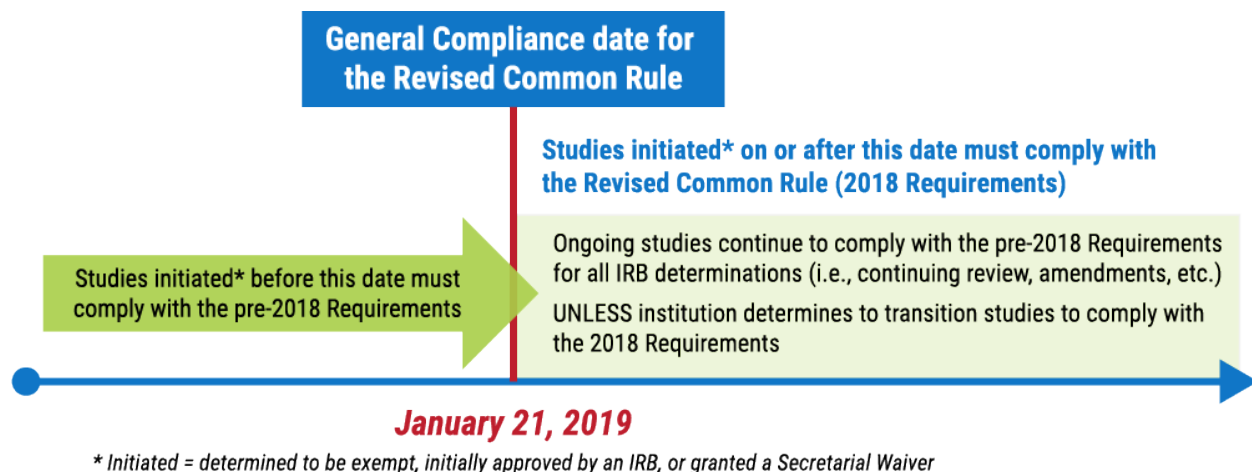
Recent Revisions to the Common Rule

The Common Rule (subpart A of the HHS regulations) was recently revised. These revisions became effective in 2018, but its compliance date was delayed until January 21, 2019.

Nevertheless, the revised rule is officially called the “2018 Requirements,” although many continue to refer to it as the “revised Common Rule,” or simply the “new Rule.”

In general, research initiated on or after January 21, 2019 must comply with the revised Common Rule, and research initiated before this date must continue to comply with the pre-2018 Common Rule. Institutions may choose to transition the latter research to the revised Common Rule, but they are not required to do so.

For now, at many institutions, both sets of regulations continue to be in operation for different research projects. Because there are distinct differences between the two versions of the Common Rule, particularly with regard to the requirements for informed consent, exemptions, and continuing review, **it is vital that investigators and IRBs know which version of the Common Rule a research project is under.**



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The Common Rule Departments and Agencies

As we mentioned, in addition to HHS, many Federal departments and agencies also follow the Common Rule. HHS-funded research must comply with both the Common Rule and the other subparts of the regulations. However, some of the other Federal departments and agencies have only adopted the Common Rule and not the other subparts of the HHS regulations.



Each Common Rule department or agency is responsible for oversight of the research that it supports or conducts. Each of them may have its own policies or a slightly nuanced interpretation of certain provisions of the Common Rule that differs from HHS's interpretations.

For example, if you are receiving funding from the Department of Education for a research study, you would direct your questions about the Common Rule and protecting research participants to the program officers at the Department of Education. **If you have a question or concern about human subjects protections, compliance, or oversight, it is important to ask the department or agency that is supporting your research.**

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Part 3: HHS Offices and Agencies

The HHS Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP)

OHRP is responsible for the regulatory oversight of human subjects research that HHS supports or conducts or that institutions choose to place under OHRP's authority.

OHRP:

- Develops guidance;
- Provides interpretation;
- Educates the regulated community; and
- Enforces compliance for the HHS regulations for human research protections at 45 CFR part 46.

To preserve its independence in regulating HHS-funded research, OHRP is under the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health and separate from other HHS components that fund or conduct HHS-regulated research.

Other HHS Offices and Agencies

As a large federal department, HHS has numerous agencies and offices that serve different functions. For example, the **National Institutes of Health (NIH)** and the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** are both part of HHS and they fund human subjects research to varying extents.



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The **U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)** is also a part of HHS. Part of FDA's broad mission includes ensuring the safety, efficacy, and security of drugs, biological products, and medical devices available to the American public.

The FDA has its own regulations that apply to the clinical investigations it oversees. These regulations align with the Common Rule, but also differ in some important ways. **While there is an ongoing effort to harmonize them, it is important for investigators and IRBs to know which regulations are applicable for a particular research project.**



- For example, research funded by a private company to test a new drug may have to comply with the FDA regulations because it involves an FDA-regulated product, but not the Common Rule because it does not involve HHS support.
- However, an NIH-funded study that involves the research use of an FDA-regulated drug may need to comply with both sets of regulations – the FDA regulations because the drug is an FDA-regulated product, and the Common Rule and its subparts because the research is funded by NIH, which is part of HHS.

Since the FDA is part of HHS, when it funds human subjects research, that research would be regulated by OHRP and must comply with the HHS regulations at 45 CFR 46, which includes the Common Rule.

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Part 4: Regulations and Institutional Policies

The Relationship Between Regulations and Institutional Policies

The Common Rule applies to certain human subjects research that is supported or conducted by a Common Rule agency. However, not all research is supported by a Common Rule agency. For these studies, there is not a comprehensive set of regulations for the protection of research subjects.

However, many research institutions choose to apply the Common Rule to all of their human subjects research regardless of funding source. They can do this formally through their institution's assurance filed with OHRP, or they can adopt the Common Rule requirements as institutional policy, in which case the institution uses the Common Rule framework for the purpose of their internal oversight of research.

In addition, institutions implement their own institutional policies and procedures, which may be more protective than the regulatory requirements. Institutions may have a mechanism to enforce their own requirements, even though the Federal government may not have regulatory authority over research when it is not supported by a Common Rule agency.

If you have questions about your institution's policies and procedures, contact your institution's human research protection program or IRB office to get more information.

Federalwide Assurances

In order to receive HHS funding to conduct certain human subjects research, institutions must have an active assurance on file with OHRP. This assurance is called an FWA, which stands for Federalwide Assurance. Through the FWA, institutions commit to comply with the regulations, comply with additional human subjects regulations and policies as applicable, establish certain required written procedures, and support IRB activities and review. Filing an FWA is a straightforward process.

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You can find information on how to get started on OHRP's website at <https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/register-irbs-and-obtain-fwas/fwas/index.html>. Contact OHRP at IRBorFWA@hhs.gov if you have questions about this.

You can watch the [videos on the assurance process](#) to learn about the requirements related to the FWA application and step-by-step instructions for the FWA submission process.

Other Common Rule agencies rely on FWAs; however, some require other types of assurances as well. Institutions or investigators should contact their funding agency to find out what type of assurance is required before research funding can be provided.

Watch a video on the Common Rule ABCs at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4A-oStZ1x4w>.