

For immediate release  
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## **ATHENS ORTHOPEDIC CLINIC HANDLING DATA BREACH OF 200,000 PATIENT RECORDS**

Athens, GA – This summer, Athens Orthopedic Clinic, a 50-year-old orthopedic practice serving Athens and greater northeast Georgia, suffered a data breach by a hacker who has attempted to extort the Clinic for ransom money. When Athens Orthopedic realized in late June that their electronic medical records system had been accessed by a hacker, they immediately notified the FBI and began working with a cyber security team to determine the source and extent of the breach. It was determined that the hacker gained access through a third-party, nationally-known healthcare information management contractor's log-in credentials. The contractor was terminated and the cyber-security team has worked diligently to determine which patient records were taken and to strengthen the security of AOC's systems. Prior to the breach, AOC had engaged IT and security experts to maintain, test and improve its system.

"To find ourselves the victim of a sophisticated crime like this is extremely unfortunate and challenging, especially given the impact it is having on our patients. Our emphasis right away was to ensure the patient records at AOC are safe, and continue to provide the high-quality patient care our communities depend upon," said Kayo Elliott, CEO of Athens Orthopedic Clinic.

Elliott says until mid-July, AOC's experts worked to determine which patient records were taken in the breach while his team worked to help prevent any further disclosure of the information. From there, it required several more weeks to prepare to mail a notification to 200,000 patients. In the interim, AOC chose to begin telling people about the breach through the media, social media, their website and a toll-free line to spread the word to their patients as fast as possible.

An Athens resident who is an AOC patient wrote the clinic via email today: "Having a dental practice out of town, no comparison in size, knowing what I do know about security breaches, it's becoming easier all the time for this sort of thing to happen. AOC has a huge patient base, I don't see any way that they could have expedited contacting their patients & I'm proud to be one of them. I'm sure they are very concerned & doing everything they can to protect their patients in the future. Now as a patient, I have followed the instructions & contacted Equifax. I wish AOC the best moving forward."

According to Elliott, once patients received the official notification starting earlier this week, calls to the toll-free line (844-382-9364), visits to [AOC's website](#) and emails to its data breach email, [AOCdatabreach@gmail.com](mailto:AOCdatabreach@gmail.com), have increased as patients seek answers to questions and updated information.

“It is extremely important that affected patients of the data breach contact one of the three major credit bureaus and place a fraud alert on their credit report using the information we’ve provided. This includes patients who were seen by physicians or providers who may or may not still be a part of our various locations. Any patient or their child who got a letter from us needs to do this as soon as possible as their personal information is vulnerable. We also hope patients will research alternatives through resources such as [identitytheft.gov](https://www.identitytheft.gov) or [clarkhoward.com](https://www.clarkhoward.com), though we understand that’s not always easy for everyone.

“Many patients are upset and frustrated with the situation, of sometimes finding the toll-free line busy, with the limitations we’ve had on what we could tell them due to the ongoing investigation, and also with difficulty in reaching the three major credit reporting agencies easily. And of course, they wish we could pay for extended credit monitoring. So do we. We truly regret that we are unable to do so, as we are not able spend the many millions of dollars it would cost us to pay for credit monitoring for nearly 200,000 patients and keep Athens Orthopedic as a viable business. I recognize and am truly sorry for the position this puts our patients in. Though a number of patients are upset, there are also those who have been understanding of what we’re dealing with. It’s an unfortunate situation for us all and we remain committed to doing our best to share helpful information and to continue the high-quality medical care we’ve provided to Athens and greater northeast Georgia for 50 years,” he said.

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