

Retention Periods for Research Data

This table outlines and compares the retention periods for research data from State Records GDA23 and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.

Where there is conflict between the retention periods the longer retention period (as shown by bold type) should be used.

Type of research data	State Records Act - General Retention and Disposal Authority – University Records (GDA 23) (2005)		Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2007)	
	Description of data	Retention period	Description of data	Retention period
1. Data for research of major significance, interest or controversy	Research data: Projects of major national or international significance, interest or controversy or where the principal investigator has a widely acknowledged influence on the area of scholarship and where the data is crucial to the substantiation of the research findings and cannot be readily or practically duplicated.	Required as State Archives (ie retain permanently)	[Data relating to] gene therapy (eg patient records)	retain permanently
		Required as State Archives (ie retain permanently)	[Data relating to] work [which]has community or heritage value	retain permanently (preferably within a national collection)
		Required as State Archives (ie retain permanently)	[Data relating to] most clinical trials	15 years
		Required as State Archives (ie retain permanently)	General research data	5 years from the date of publication. However, in any particular case, the period for which data should be retained should be determined by the specific type of research

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2. Data for research with human subjects and potential long term effects	Research data: Projects which are not of major significance – where the project has human subjects and potential long term effects including animal testing for human products. Includes clinical or psychological research. <i>For example:</i> intervention or invasive testing, drug and complementary medicine trials, scanning and radioactivity, clinical studies, genetic manipulation, human tissue studies, trials of devices, some psychological research.	Retain for minimum of 20 years after project completed, or after research subjects have reached the age of 25 years, whichever is longer, then destroy. [See note below]	[Data relating to] gene therapy (eg patient records)	Retain permanently
		Retain for minimum of 20 years after project completed, or after research subjects have reached the age of 25 years, whichever is longer, then destroy. [See note below]	[Data relating to] work [which]has community or heritage value	Retain permanently (preferably within a national collection)
		Retain for minimum of 20 years after project completed, or after research subjects have reached the age of 25 years, whichever is longer, then destroy. [See note below]	[Data relating to] most clinical trials	Retain for 15 years
		Retain for minimum of 20 years after project completed, or after research subjects have reached the age of 25 years, whichever is longer, then destroy. [See note below]	General research data	Retain for minimum of 5 years from the date of publication. However, in any particular case, the period for which data should be retained should be determined by the specific type of research

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3. Data for research with potential long term environmental effects	Research data: Projects which are not of major significance – where the research has potential long term environmental effect. For example: genetic trials, disease and pest management, changes to ecosystems; use of environmentally hazardous materials.	Retain for minimum of 20 years after project completed, then destroy. Retention periods for these records may need to also take into account other legislative or regulatory requirements such as the <i>Environmentally Hazardous Chemicals Act</i> (1985) and the <i>Contaminated Land Management Act</i> (1997)	General research data	Retain for minimum of 5 years from the date of publication. However, in any particular case, the period for which data should be retained should be determined by the specific type of research
4. Data for research without potential long term effects	Research data: Projects which are not of major significance – where the research does not have potential long term affects, including research on animals.	Retain for minimum of 5 years after project completed, then destroy.	General research data	Retain for minimum of 5 years from the date of publication. However, in any particular case, the period for which data should be retained should be determined by the specific type of research
		Retain for minimum of 5 years after project completed, then destroy.	short-term research projects that are for assessment purposes only, such as research projects completed by students	Retain for 12 months
5. Data which have been copied	Research data: Paper records which have been converted to electronic format (eg through data entry or imaging).	Retain until no longer required for reference or administrative purpose, then destroy.	Data must be held for sufficient time to allow reference The minimum period of retention	Retain for minimum of 5 years from the date of publication. However, in any particular case, the period for which data should be retained should be determined by the specific type of research

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Note:

The GDA 23 disposal class for Data for research with human subjects and potential long term effects notes that although the minimum retention period is 20 years (or after research subjects have reached the age of 25 years, whichever is longer) other considerations affecting retention may need to be taken into account. For example, workers compensation regulations allow for a claimant to reopen a case at any time during the lifetime of the claimant, which may necessitate records to be retained for up to approximately 70 years after the research project is completed.