

These *Emailing Guidelines* must be used by Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) and Providence Health Care (PHC) staff and physicians when communicating by email with clients, patients or residents; family members or representatives; other care providers; and/or staff members; and in conjunction with the VCH/PHC Emailing policy.

Information on specific scenarios has been organized in these guidelines as follows:

- [Emails Between VCH/PHC Staff/Physicians/Care Providers and Clients, Patients and Residents](#)
- [Emails Between VCH/PHC Staff/Physicians/Care Providers and Other Health Authority Care Providers](#)
- [Emails Between VCH/PHC Staff/Physicians/Care Providers and External Care Providers or Other External Parties](#)

NOTE: For the purposes of these guidelines, "clients, patients or residents" includes their family members or representative

If you have any questions regarding the information in these guidelines, contact:

- VCH Information Privacy Office: (604) 875-5568 or privacy@vch.ca
- PHC Information Access & Privacy Office: (604) 806-8336 or privacy@providencehealth.bc.ca

Emails Between VCH/PHC Staff/Physicians/Care Providers and Clients, Patients and Residents

Scenario	Examples	Email Best Practices
Emailing clients, patients or residents: messages contain no personal information (other than the client's, patient's or resident's email address)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating an email distribution list (for newsletters, upcoming events, etc.) • Providing resources to clients, patients or residents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Request client, patient or resident initiates an email to you to join the distribution list to validate addresses and identities of group members • Blind carbon copy (BCC) all list members to avoid sharing email addresses • Include no personal information in group correspondence • Clearly indicate processes for ending communications or leaving the distribution list (opting out)
Emailing or responding to clients, patients or residents requesting personal information for administrative purposes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For administrative purposes e.g. scheduling/cancelling appointments, appointment reminders • Providing patient immunization records 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Validate the client's, patient's or resident's identity by sending an initial email message to confirm correct email address, or have the client, patient or resident initiate the email • Provide the VCH/PHC notice Emailing or Texting your Health Care Provider in an initial validation email

Scenario	Examples	Email Best Practices
Email or responding to clients, patients or residents for ROI (release of information)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Records requested through the ROI process e.g. requests for full patient charts or portions of charts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health Information Management processes apply - see VCH Request Health Records or PHC Patient Records
<p>Emailing or responding to clients, patients or residents or family members* for clinical care purposes</p> <p><i>*Note:</i> only in accordance with relevant Information Privacy and Confidentiality policies (VCH or PHC) and Family Involvement/Presence (Visitation) policies (VCH or PHC)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Care coordination and corresponding with clients around their ongoing care and management of health conditions Checking on a client, patient or resident (i.e. how are you doing? Do you need anything?) Responding to client's, patient's or resident's requests for services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See guidance above regarding administrative purposes <p>AND</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Email should NOT be relied upon for crisis-related support or initial diagnoses reporting Emailing certain medication or treatment orders or using email as the primary form of providing ongoing medical advice or treatment may be restricted by some professional practice standards; staff and physicians are advised to check with their College or other professional association for further information regarding this Email should NOT be relied upon for managing urgent or emergency situations

Emails Between VCH Staff/Physicians/Care Providers and Other Health Authority Care Providers

Scenario	Examples	Email Best Practices
<p>Emailing personal information between VCH and care providers/staff using a health authority or other trusted institutional email address (VCH.ca, providencehealth.bc.ca, PHSA.ca, etc.) for direct care purposes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using email to communicate with other health authority care providers around the care that is being provided to a particular patient, including referrals from one program to another and sharing relevant records to support care.* <p><u>*Note:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Email policies and practices may differ between health authorities. If emailing to staff or care providers in other health authorities, confirm their willingness to accept the use of email before sending. For program-level changes where email is intended to completely replace another medium of communication, e.g. faxes, a Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) may be required. Please contact the VCH Information Privacy Office or PHC Information Access & Privacy Office for guidance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confirm email addresses using the health authority's e-directories, particularly for staff with common names Review the email chain and all recipients included in the reply and CC lines to ensure personal information (including personal identifiers required to accurately identify the client, patient or resident) are only shared on a need to know basis Where possible without affecting care, avoid full patient names in the subject line of the message Lists of clients, patients or residents should only be sent as an encrypted attachment, unless it is a small amount of personal information in total (considering both the number of clients and the amount and sensitivity of personal information about each client, e.g. less than 10 clients, patients or residents with minimal health information about each client) (see IMITs Encryption and Password Recommendations). For transmitting large or more sensitive data sets or data for secondary use, consult with VCH Data Release Management or the PHC Information Access & Privacy Office.

Emails Between VCH/PHC Staff/Physicians/Care Providers and External Care Providers or Other External Parties

Scenario	Examples	Email Best Practices
Emailing personal information between VCH/PHC and external care providers or other partners in care delivery (non-health authority email addresses) for direct care purposes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using email to communicate with other care providers outside of health authorities, e.g. GP offices, around the care that is being provided to a particular patient, including referrals from one program to another and sharing relevant records to support care.* <p><i>*Note:</i> For program-level changes where email is intended to completely replace another medium of communication, e.g. faxes, a Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) may be required. Please contact the VCH Information Privacy Office or PHC Information Access & Privacy Office for guidance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See guidance directly above <p>AND</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Validate the care provider's identity by sending an initial email message to confirm correct email address or have the care provider initiate the email
Emails between VCH/PHC and external parties (non-care providers) for case management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing a legal claim case file with legal counsel Managing a WorkSafeBC claim issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal information may be sent as required on a need to know basis, where authorized by the BC Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) Validate the external party's identity by sending an initial email message to confirm the correct email address or have the external party initiate the email Review the email chain and all recipients included in the reply and CC lines to ensure personal information is only shared on a need to know basis Email is not appropriate for sending lists of clients to external parties for purposes other than direct care in accordance with the guidelines above. For secondary use, refer to guidance provided by VCH Data Release Management or PHC Information Access & Privacy Office