

COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR PROVIDER USING ELECTRONIC MAIL (E-MAIL)

What you need to know about e-mail communication



The Elliot Physicians Network

Why Electronic Mail?

More and more of our patients will find it convenient to communicate with us via electronic mail (e-mail). There are a number of advantages to e-mail communications. It is quick, easy to produce and read, inexpensive, and self-documenting. E-Mail is well suited to many of the common communications needs between patients and their health care providers: prescription refills, lab results, appointment requests, insurance questions, and routine follow up of non-urgent problems.

This new tool holds great promise, but also brings some concerns. E-mail may not be as secure as other forms of communications, raising concerns about patient privacy. Mistakes in addressing, automatic "cc" features, hackers, routing through outside internet service providers and utilization of employer's email systems all raise the possibility of breaches of confidentiality. The promise and concerns arising from e-mail make it important that patients understand how e-mail can best be used for communicating with health care providers in The Elliot Physicians Network.

This document explains how The Elliot Physicians Network and its patients can use e-mail most effectively and safely. Please read this document thoroughly and discuss any questions or concerns directly with your health care provider before using e-mail to communicate. If you and your provider decide to use e-mail, you will be asked to acknowledge your understanding and give your written consent to using e-mail for clinical communication.

Please keep a copy of this document for future reference.

What Is My Doctor's E-Mail Address?

All electronic mail directed to your physician or nurse practitioner should be sent to the following e-mail address:

<p>My Provider's e-mail address:</p> <p>_____@elliot-hs.org</p>

What Kind Of Communications Are Suitable For E-Mail With My Provider?

E-mail is especially well suited for non-urgent, non-sensitive communications. This might include requests for prescription refills, routine medical advice and follow-up, lab test results and general questions about existing conditions.

What Kind Of Communications Are Not Suitable For E-Mail With My Provider?

Urgent medical problems are not meant for e-mail. If you have a serious or urgent question or problem, you should call the providers office.

Also, sensitive matters are not suitable for e-mail. For example, do not send results of sexually transmitted disease testing, treatment for mental health problems, drug and alcohol related disorders and worker's compensation issues. E-mail is not a substitute for personal contact and/or provider examination. Although many matters can be dealt with via e-mail, your provider may need to speak with you directly or schedule you for an office visit.

Why Are There Concerns About Sensitive Matters Being Included In E-Mail Communications?

The privacy of e-mail communications is not as protected as, for example, postal mail or phone calls. Inadvertent disclosure of e-mail content can easily occur. For example, it is easy to make a mistake in e-mail addresses since they can be complicated, and the e-mail may be sent to the wrong person. Users of e-mail can accidentally "cc" others when quickly replying to a message.

Many patients will use e-mail services provided through their employers. Your employer or other employees can potentially read these messages. Shared e-mail accounts, like family accounts, can also compromise privacy. Some patients will use commercial e-mail accounts from internet service providers (such as America OnLine-AOL). Hackers often try to intercept such communications. There are only limited legal protections concerning the confidentiality of electronic messaging.

For these reasons, you are urged not to include sensitive information in e-mail communications with your provider. We will not initiate e-mails to you about sensitive matters and will not use e-mail to respond to you about areas we think might be sensitive.

We will only communicate with you using e-mail if you have given us your written permission to do so. If you decide later that you do not want us to use e-mail to communicate with you, you must notify us in writing.

In order to protect your privacy, we cannot respond to e-mails from family members or others. The exception to this is parents communicating regarding their minor children.

How Quickly Will I Get A Response?

We will respond to your e-mails within 3 business days (72 hours). We ask that you also reply to our e-mail responses so we can be sure that you received them. You should not expect replies to your e-mails over weekends or holidays or during provider vacations. If you need to speak with the provider sooner, please call the practice directly. Again, urgent matters should not be dealt with via e-mail.

Should My E-Mails Contain Any Special Information?

All e-mails to your provider should include the patient's name, date of birth and medical record number.

Medical Record Number:

E-mail addresses often are not sufficiently detailed to allow us to clearly identify the sender. Therefore, it is essential that you **identify yourself and include your full e-mail address and telephone number** in the text of the message. **Parents communicating with a provider regarding their minor children should include both their own name and the name, date of birth and medical record number of their child.** Communications that do not contain the required information will be returned unanswered with a message to tell the sender that the required information has not been provided. This is intended to help protect your confidentiality and assure that we identify you correctly.

When e-mailing, please be concise. If your message/questions takes more than 1-2 minutes to read and more than 3-5 minutes for a response, it would be optimal to call for an appointment instead of utilizing e-mail. Likewise, if the patient needs to send more than 2 messages in a single day or 4 messages in a single week, it would be optimal to call for an appointment instead. Keep copies of e-mails you receive from us. We will save e-mail messages in your medical record. The subject of the e-mail should include a brief description of the type of message, for example, "Refill Request", "Medical Advice".

Will My Provider Give My E-Mail Address To Others?

We will not provide your name or e-mail address to anyone outside of your provider's practice location.

Are E-Mails From My Provider "Encrypted" Or "Scrambled"?

Some types of electronic communications can be sent "scrambled" (encrypted) so that only the sender and recipient can read them. However, electronic messages from your Provider cannot be encrypted when sent across the internet. All e-mails between patients and their provider are transmitted as readable text, which can make it easier for hackers to intercept and read messages.

What About Technical Problems?

Technical problems are possible in any computer system. Power failures and system crashes are all possible. We guard against this type of technical problem, however, your provider and The Elliot Physicians Network is not responsible for problems resulting from such technical failures. If you do not receive a prompt answer to your e-mail, please contact your providers practice by other means.

I have read this document and have had an opportunity to have any questions about electronic mail with my provider and The Elliot Physician's Network answered by my provider. I understand the terms outlined in this brochure and agree to abide by these terms. I understand the risks involved in using electronic mail communication. I agree to indemnify and hold harmless my provider and The Elliot Physicians Network, its employees, officers, and directors from any liability, claim, or damages arising out of technical problems with my or my provider's/The Elliot Physicians Network's computer system, including power outages, system crashes, or system overloads. I would like to use this method of communication in addition to other traditional media (telephone, office visits, postal mail), and consent to my provider/The Elliot Physicians Network communicating with me through electronic communication.

My Name (PRINT): _____

Include other family member names under the age of 18:

*Children over 18 or spouses must provide their own consent form.

My Elliot Physician Network Medical Record Number: _____

My Electronic Mail Address (PRINT): _____

My Phone Number: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

My Provider's Name: _____

Witness (PRINT): _____

Witness Signature: _____ Date: _____