

Information sheet C10 – Communicating with us by email

There are many benefits in using email to communicate with us, and we would positively encourage you to use this means of communication if you are comfortable with it. However there are also some potential risks, and this information sheet explains what they are and what precautions you can take to minimise them.

Using email is your choice. Nobody has to use email to communicate with us – if you are not happy about using it, for whatever reason, we will communicate with you by post.

■ Why communicate with us by email?

Email has a number of advantages over correspondence by letter:

- It is faster and more convenient
- It saves money, both for you and for us
- People with sight impairments can use text-to-speech readers
- Emailing means that what you write can easily be copied into another document – for instance if you have a suggestion about how we should change the way we have described your needs in an assessment
- If used carefully, it can also be more secure. Emails won't be accidentally put through the letter box of the house next door, and are personally addressed to the person they are for.

For all of these reasons, we would encourage anyone who is comfortable using email to opt for receiving information from us in this way.

If you do not have an email account yourself, there may be someone you trust whose email address you could ask us to send information to – but please remember that assessments of your care and support needs may include some personal and confidential information which you don't want to share, so you should only do this if you are sure that you are happy for the person picking up the emails to see all information we send you.

■ What risks are there?

As with most kinds of computer use, you will need to make sure that the computer or other device that you are using is secure. You should make sure that your anti-virus software is up to date, and that you take care with passwords and other aspects of security. This is up to you – we can't take any responsibility for this.

It may be possible for hackers to break into emails. If you use an email service provided by a well-known company, they are likely to be taking considerable care over the security of emails, since their business depends on that – but we can't take responsibility for the security of any information which passes outside the NHS networks that we use for our own internal communications.

There is also a risk that email addresses may be typed wrong – and emails can very easily be copied to other people if they do go to the wrong address.

■ Making sure we have your permission

Before we send any confidential information to you by email, we will ask you to confirm that you are happy with that. We will ask you to confirm that you have been given a copy of this information sheet, and that you have had a chance to discuss it.

■ Making sure we have the right address

If you tell us that you want to correspond with us by email, we will ask you to give us an email address. We will send a test email to this address before we send you any personal and confidential information. The test email will not include any sensitive information, but will ask you to confirm information that someone else would not know if they got the email by mistake.

■ If you have queries

If there are other questions you would like to ask us about before deciding whether to communicate with us regularly by email, please either ask one of our staff to find out more information for you, or email your query to socialcare@northumbria.nhs.uk