

## 10 Tips for Safe Faxing

The HIPAA Privacy Rule permits doctors, laboratories and other health care providers to share patient information via fax. Following are ways to ensure that your faxing practices do not make protected patient information (PHI) vulnerable to theft:

1. When sending a fax, include a cover sheet indicating the date and time sent; the recipient's name and fax number; and the sender's name, organization and phone number. The fax cover sheet should NEVER include a patient's name or any other PHI.
2. Include a privacy statement in the fax cover sheet. This should indicate that the information on the fax is confidential, that it is intended only for the use of the individual to whom it is addressed, and that if someone other than the intended individual receives the fax, they should notify the sender and destroy the fax.
3. Keep fax machines in areas that are not accessible to patients and visitors.
4. Do not leave documents containing PHI on the machine unattended.
5. Periodically check the fax machine to see if an outgoing fax is ready to be removed or if incoming faxes have arrived.
6. If your fax machine can store incoming faxes in a buffer, consider disabling auto print. Assign a staff member to periodically check the buffer, print all faxes and deliver them to the appropriate individuals.
7. Turn fax machines off overnight so that faxes do not arrive when cleaning crews or other unauthorized visitors might be in the office.
8. Assign a staff member to regularly check with the fax machine manufacturer to determine whether they have issued any patches to repair vulnerabilities.
9. Verify the fax number to be used when sending PHI and ask recipients to notify your office if they do not receive it within a specified timeframe.
10. Regularly print the fax log, and store the logs in a binder or other designated place. This will ensure that you have a record of all faxes in the event there is ever a question about whether a fax was sent or received.

Faxes are a convenient way to quickly share patient information with consultants. It is vital to keep staff educated about faxing safety and to implement policies to prevent HIPAA violations that are caused by faxing errors.

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