

## Email Policy

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*Please be advised that during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we have relaxed our email policy, as we have assessed that the security risks of email are outweighed by the benefits of reducing the need for patients to come to the clinic to collect/obtain documents. We use secure messaging systems, which includes password protection for documents and electronic prescription (eRx).*

*If you prefer to not receive emails from us, please let our reception staff know and we will ask you if you have updated/changed your email address – please inform us of any changes.*

*Prescriptions will be sent as an eScript (electronic script), referrals will be sent directly to specialists, and other documents can be collected from our reception. If your doctor offers to email a referral, or other document to you during your consultation and you agree to us doing so, you will be deemed to have accepted the security risks associated with emails.*

*Our email address for the main reception is - reception@lagoonmedicalcentre.com.au. You can use this email address to communicate with our practice, including all of our doctors and staff, subject to the warnings discussed below.*

*Our practice manager email address is: admin@lagoonmedicalcentre.com.au.*

***We aim to respond to emails within two business days of receipt. If you require a more urgent response due to the nature of your enquiry, please call the practice on (08) 6117 0480 to ensure we address your query sooner.***

## Policy

This email policy is to provide information on how we manage our privacy and security via email communications. This email policy is adapted from and in accordance with RACGP 5<sup>th</sup> Edition standards and AHPRA guidelines.

General practices are increasingly receiving requests from patients, other clinicians and third parties for health information to be sent to them electronically because it is an easily accessible method of communicating. The Australian Privacy Principles published by the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner state that: "Health information is regarded as one of the most sensitive types of personal information.

For this reason, the Privacy Act 1988 (Privacy Act) provides extra protections around its handling". <http://www.oaic.gov.au/privacy/privacy-act/health-and-medical-research> The Privacy Act defines health information as:

1. information or an opinion about:
  1. the health or a disability (at any time) of an individual; or
  2. an individual's expressed wishes about the future provision of health services to him or her; or
  3. a health service provided, or to be provided, to an individual; that is also personal information; or
2. other personal information collected to provide, or in providing, a health service; or
3. other personal information about an individual collected in connection with the donation, or intended donation, by the individual of his or her body parts, organs or body substances; or
4. genetic information about an individual in a form that is, or could be, predictive of the health of the individual or a genetic relative of the individual.

## Rationale

As all health information is sensitive by nature, all communication of health information, including via electronic means, must adequately protect the patient's privacy. Our practice takes reasonable steps to make our communication of health information adequately safe and secure.

General practitioners, health providers and patients should be aware of the risks associated with using email in the healthcare environment.

## Obligations

Our practice considers our obligations under the Privacy Act before we use or disclose any health information.

The Privacy Act does not prescribe how a healthcare organisation should communicate health information. Any method of communication may be used as long as the organisation takes reasonable steps to protect the information transmitted and the privacy of the patient. A failure to take reasonable steps to protect health information may constitute a breach of the Australian Privacy Principles and may result in action taken against the organisation by the Australian Privacy Commissioner.

What amounts to reasonable steps will depend on the nature of the information and the potential harm that could be caused by unauthorized access to it. The RACGP has developed a matrix to assist practices in determining the level of security required in order to use email in general practice for communication.

Our practice reserves the right to check an individual's email accounts as a precaution to fraud, viruses, workplace harassment or breaches of confidence by members of the practice team. Inappropriate use of the email facility will be fully investigated and may be grounds for dismissal.

### **Booking, changing or cancelling appointments**

Please do not email us with requests for appointments or changes to appointments, unless you wish to cancel an appointment and our reception is closed. Instead, please phone us on (08) 6117 0480 to book, change or cancel an appointment. You can also book an appointment online using Hot Doc (and if you do so you can change or cancel your appointment through Hot Doc).

Unless you have opted out, you will receive an SMS appointment reminder the day before (24 hours in advance) your appointment, and you can use the link in the SMS to change or cancel your appointment.

### **Warning regarding the security of email communications**

Please note that our email service is not encrypted, and therefore we cannot guarantee the security of our email communications. There is a risk that emails and/or attachments could be read by someone other than the intended recipient (for example, as a result of widespread hacking, or because someone accesses your email account).

For this reason, we discourage health providers from sending emails to us with personal information about patients, and we discourage patients from sending emails to us with their own personal information.

However, in certain circumstances, we may agree to email you with a response to a query and/or with information or documentation that you have requested which does include your health information, provided that you have confirmed that you have considered and accepted the risks associated with email communications, such as:

1. Hacking of email accounts and electronic transmission and can access information including your confidential information
2. If your details are not up to date in our system. Our practice staff will ask you on each visit if any of your details have changed, i.e., mobile number, address, email address.

Before we do so, we will need to verify your identity and your email address. We may also require you to email us confirming that you have considered and accepted the risks associated with email communications, or we may send you a link which is password protected.

### **Other health practitioners**

We ask that other health practitioners **do not email us with personal information** about mutual patients (unless you have the patient's express consent). We prefer to receive correspondence via secure messaging, such as Health Link, fax (08) 6117 0481, or if you are sending documents via

Lagoon Medical Centre  
1/283 Beelihar Drive, Yangebup WA 6164  
Phone: (08) 6117 0480 Fax: (08) 6117 0481



email, password protected emailing is preferred. Please avoid posting us correspondence if you are able to send via one of these messaging systems.

## **Changes**

We reserve the right to change the Email Policy at any time. Any changes or amendments will be made available to staff, patients, external health practitioners and visitors.