

Safe Haven Briefing: Secure transfer of personal identifiable information by fax

This briefing reminds organisations of the risks of using internal and external directories to locate fax numbers, and provides general guidance on the principles that should be followed when sharing personal identifiable information by fax.

It is recommended that NHS organisations, and NHS Business Partners should always undertake and document an IG information risk assessment whenever a method of transferring personal identifiable information is being considered, if you are in any doubt speak to your local IG (confidentiality/data protection/security) lead. Further information and guidance can be obtained from [Information Governance Toolkit](#) (Knowledge Base Resources) or from Exeter Helpdesk on **0845 3713671** or exeter.helpdesk@hscic.gov.uk

As part of the risk assessment for faxing, organisations should consider the way in which fax numbers will be located. Particular care must be taken where location of fax numbers involves using directories (whether internal or external), because the contact details held in a directory may have changed since publication, or the details may have been incorrectly documented. In addition, organisations should proceed with care when using commercial directories that have not been endorsed as suitable for use by the NHS.

[NHS Choices](#) provides a central search facility where you can locate local services (Hospitals, GPs, Dental Practices etc).

Secure faxing principles

- any confidential information held by the organisation should only be sent by fax where it is absolutely necessary
- patient identifiable information should only be sent by FAX, in emergency situations
- ensure that FAX machines are located in secure areas at both ends of the transmission
- always double check the FAX number that you are sending information to
- if you are unsure about the number you are sending a FAX to, do not send the information without verifying the number with the recipient
- use pre-programmed numbers where possible to avoid misdialling
- contact the recipient before sending to let them know you will be sending a FAX
- ask the recipient to acknowledge receiving the FAX immediately
- confidential Faxes must not be left lying around for unauthorised staff to see
- personal details should be faxed separately from clinical details. Clinical details should be sent using the NHS number and no Patient identifiable Information should be within the detail
- make sure the fax cover sheet is marked Private and Confidential and states who information is for.