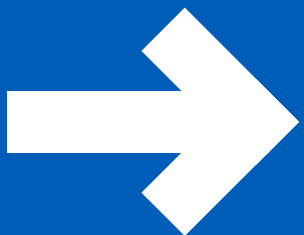


# Practice guidance

## Removal of facsimile (fax) machines from general practice

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This guide has been developed to allow you to easily navigate to the information you need, whether it is contained in the guide itself or linked to a website.

All buttons and images can be clicked on.

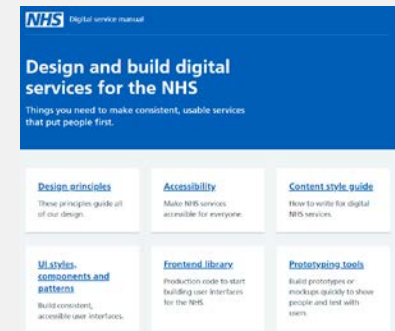
Quick links at the bottom left of each page



Navigation buttons at the bottom of each page. The home button takes you to the introduction page.



Examples of other links within this guide



[gp-prototype.innovationlab.org.uk](http://gp-prototype.innovationlab.org.uk)

- 1) [Introduction](#)
- 2) [GP Contract](#)
- 3) [Guidance](#)
- 4) [Implementation Process](#)
- 5) [Evaluation and Benefits](#)
- 6) [Final Checklist](#)



The GP contract states that GP Practices will no longer use facsimile (fax) machines for either NHS or patient communications by April 2020.

This best practice guidance document provides staff the direction, considerations and implementation plans for stopping the use of fax machines from GP Practices for NHS or patient communications, in support of the GP contract digital commitment.

The recently published NHS Long Term Plan (LTP) and GMS contract have highlighted that technology will play a central role within the delivery of care. This guidance is an opportunity to move away from non secure communications via fax, NHSE/I is providing access to NHS mail for social care providers and supporting services.

## **Testimonial: Advantages of not having a fax**

The transition was made easy as our fax machine stopped working however the advantages of not having the fax machine; were evident within a few weeks.

Initially departments would phone up to say that they couldn't send a fax though, we then asked the senders to email requests instead. Although some were reluctant to do so, we believe it forced the users into changing their mindset, as no other alternative was offered.

Emailing is by far, a better way of sending patient identifiable data, it is less time consuming than people think, and of course it saves paper.

**Alison Peat, Acting Practice Manager,  
South East London**

## 2020 Contractual arrangements

NHS England and GPC England have agreed an ambitious programme of work to be delivered over the next five years. There have been agreed measures that will become contractual requirements in April 2020 or April 2021 subject to available IT infrastructure.

NHS England and GPC England expect practices, where feasible, to be making progress in 2019/20 towards meeting those requirements. The use of alternatives to facsimile (fax) machines for NHS and patient communications is listed in the GMS contract 5 year framework and the associated guidance that supports the Long-Term Plan.

The commitment states:-

- By April 2020, practices will no longer use facsimile (fax) machines for either NHS or patient communications.

Fax machines will be removed across the NHS in a bid to improve patient safety and cyber security. The outdated technology will be phased out by 31 March 2020 under plans announced by Secretary of State Matt Hancock in 2018. NHS organisations will be required to use modern communication methods instead, such as secure email.

## Key Considerations

This guide discusses the considerations and provides guidance on the issues surrounding removal of the fax machine in GP practices.

The following pages contain guidance and process steps that will help you to successfully remove the fax machine from your practice by April 2020.

The key considerations are:

Consideration	Information to consider and planning
Resources	Ensure you allocate enough resources to deliver the plan Project time for admin tasks should not be underestimated and considered fully
Planning	A plan/checklist will help you to allocate tasks, timescales and monitor progress effectively
Staff buy in	Involve all staff in developing the new process - they will be the key to making this a success
Communications	A robust communications plan will ensure all stakeholders are aware of what the new process will be and when it will happen

Fall back use of faxes was considered, it became obvious that GP practices should have business continuity plans in place, but they are not expected to rely on faxes.

1	<a href="#">Form a project team</a>
2	<a href="#">Who are you in contact with by fax?</a>
3	<a href="#">New ways of working</a>
4	<a href="#">Communications</a>
5	<a href="#">Remove fax number and add email</a>
6	<a href="#">Update patient facing information</a>

### Form project team and agree responsibilities

Example project team

Practice Manager	Overall project management
Admin Staff and Team Manager (includes medical secretaries and support staff)	Project support to look at different ways of working and any business change
Reception Team and Manager	Project support to look at different ways of working and any business change
GP named Clinical Lead	Clinical support and guidance for the project
IT, Quality, Governance Manager	Guidance and support to ensure best practice for any IT infrastructure needs, data security and governance for sharing data
Social care and supporting services staff - e.g. Care Home Manager, Senior Care staff, Lead Nurse, Pharmacists, Social Care admin teams etc.	Project support to look at different ways of working and any business change with regards to different ways of approaching communication.



#### Populate a list of all users that send and receive information from GP practice via fax

Monitor sent and received faxes for a minimum of four weeks and record on a usage log. Once you have a comprehensive list, contact all key stakeholder listed about the changes to the fax machines. Explain how you will work through the process with them to identify risks and changes in working practice that may be required.

Identify and agree an alternative secure route to communicate with these stakeholders. You may wish to retain this log for a short period in case any concerns are raised. Please destroy the document once the stakeholder engagement work is complete.

See below an example list from a GP practice:

Who communicates with your practice using fax	For what reason	Send or receive	Contact details	Frequency	Comments
Next Door Care Home	Visit requests	Receive	<a href="mailto:nextdoor@carehome.com">nextdoor@carehome.com</a>	Daily	Professionals email has been shared, this is not a secure encrypted account, PID cannot be included in message. Encourage uptake of NHS mail.
Down the road pharmacy	Medication request	Receive	<a href="mailto:Downtheroad@pharmacy.nhs.net">Downtheroad@pharmacy.nhs.net</a>	Daily	Professionals email has been shared. This is a secure encrypted account.

NHS mail accounts already set up and in use need to be reviewed and a decision made regarding email address inbox management.

A different email address should be considered for patients. It can be an easy transition if you take some precautionary steps, for example, ensure the administration team are informed and have the skills, where required, to manage extra incoming emails to the practice email inbox.

### **Best practice for managing NHS Mail clinical enquiries and requests:**

An automated response should be set to inform the professional/s that their email has been received.

Suggested text:

Thank you for your email. We will get back to you for all Non-Urgent emails within 48 hours during working hours Mon-Fri 9.00am-6.30pm.

For advice or guidance on any health conditions please visit: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/>

NHS 111 service should be used if you urgently need medical help or advice and it is not life-threatening <https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/urgent-and-emergency-care/nhs-111/>

Call 999 for any emergency or anything life threatening.

Using your stakeholder list, send a communication to all stakeholders explaining:

- the removal date of the fax machine
- the agreed process in place to manage emails instead of faxes before the fax is switched 'off'
- your new contact information
- their responsibility with regards to GDPR and encryption when sending and receiving patient identifiable information using anything other than NHS mail.

These documents may help when implementing your change process:

[Guidance for sending secure email](#)

[How to password protect documents](#)

[Example of fax letter](#)

[Communications letter to be sent out to Care Homes](#)

### Step Five: remove fax number and add email

In order to successfully implement this project, please also consider these actions:

1. Remove the old fax number from all of the following:
  - Letter headers including any pre-printed materials
  - Correspondence documents
  - Website
  - Social media
2. Replace with your email address of choice
3. Review all templates within the GP system and change to support the new contact information.

### Setting up a patient facing email

The GP contract also mentions the need for a patient facing email address where patients can contact the practice directly.

6.1 Practices are encouraged to have a patient-facing email account. NHS England and GPC England will publish guidance on how to deal with emails from patients, including how frequently inboxes should be monitored.

Steps to take when setting up your practice's patient facing email address:

- Consider which email address is to be patient facing – ensure the one you choose is easy to be identified as patient facing
- Who will manage the inbox from the practice side
- Add the new contact information to the practice website
- Remember to delete and file incoming emails as there is a limited mail box size for the nhs.net mail accounts
- Remove the fax number.

## Best practice for managing sent NHS Mail patient enquiries and requests:

An automated response should be sent to inform the patients that their email has been received.

Suggested text:

Thank you for your email

We will get back to you for all Non-Urgent emails within 48 hours during working hours Mon-Fri  
9.00am-6.30pm.

For advice or guidance on any health conditions please visit:

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NHS 111 service should be used if you urgently need medical help or advice and it is not life-  
threatening

<https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/hs-services/urgent-and-emergency-care/nhs-111/>

Call 999 for any emergency or anything life threatening.






This page looks at possible time and cost savings within the practice across the admin, reception and GP teams by removing the fax machine.

[Click here](#) to see benefits calculator which gives an estimated cost saving for your practice following the removal of the fax machine(s).

Practices, pharmacies and care homes who no longer use fax machines have reported the following benefits:

- Reduction in material and running costs
- Reduction in time spent walking to the fax machine and around the building
- Reduction in errors and queries as the communications are clearer
- Reduction in missing requests thanks to a safer and more secure data transfer
- Better audit trail
- Improved data security and clinical safety as having NHS mail allows communications with the practice via secure email
- Improved turnaround time for queries due to secure email communications improving patient care.

## Quick reference checklist

-  **Form project team:** include Practice Manager, Admin, Reception, GP leadership support, IT/Compliance Officer, Social Care Providers and Supporting Staff.
-  **Identify stakeholders:** monitor and log faxes sent and received from all key stakeholders. Contact all stakeholders recorded on the log and explain the upcoming changes, the process, any risks and new ways of working going forward.
-  **New ways of working:** Review any NHS mail accounts already set up. Select a shared email address for professionals and one for patients and agree a management process with relevant staff.
-  **Communications:** Contact all stakeholders on the log and outline the date the fax machine will be removed, new contact information including the responsibilities with governance. Example letters are available in the full guidance [click here](#).
-  **Admin:** Remove fax number and add email on all letterheads, correspondence documents, website, social media. Review templates in GP system to align with new contact info.

Remove all fax machines and manage any issues.

## Final Checklist

### Key Considerations:

Ensure resources are in place to cover the task, do not underestimate. Plan the project robustly, staff buy in will be key to success.

Good communications with key stakeholders is also vital to ensure the move from fax communications to more secure data sharing via email is successful.



## Further information

This guide discusses the considerations and provides guidance on the how to implement the removal of fax machines from your GP practice.

If you would like to read about a practice that have removed their fax machines please click [here](#) for the case study.

here If you require further information please contact us at Digital Primary Care Team:  
[pcdt@nhsx.nhs.uk](mailto:pcdt@nhsx.nhs.uk)