

Email communication with Patients during COVID

Purpose: To provide guidance to clinicians and support staff with respect to communicating with patients via email during the COVID-19 pandemic. This document shall serve as interim guidance during COVID-19 and shall not replace the existing [Use of Email Policy](#).

In order to ensure our patients continue to receive timely and effective care, we understand that consent to communicate via email may need to be obtained verbally from the patient or substitute decision maker (“SDM”), rather than in writing. In order to obtain verbal consent, the patient or SDM must be fully aware of the risks involved with email communication.

Southlake providers may communicate with patients or their authorized SDM through email to support the patient's care at Southlake. Circumstances which may warrant email communication with the patient or SDM include:

- To change/confirm an existing appointment or to schedule new appointments;
- To provide resources and answer questions relating to virtual care options;
- To provide test results, prescriptions or lab test requisitions to the patient;
- To provide other services or guidance to support the care and treatment of the patient.

Consent Script (clinical or support staff may have this conversation over the phone with patient)

Southlake will use reasonable means to protect the security and confidentiality of information sent and received via email; however, because of the risks outlined below, Southlake cannot guarantee the security and confidentiality of electronic communications.

Please note that you may revoke consent at any time by contacting your care provider or the Southlake Privacy Office at privacy@southlakeregional.org or 905-895-4521 ext. 2395

1. Use of electronic communications to discuss sensitive information can increase the risk of information being disclosed to third parties.
2. Despite reasonable efforts to protect the privacy and security of electronic communication, it is not possible to completely secure the information.
3. Employers and online services may have a legal right to inspect electronic communications that pass through our systems (such as email).
4. Electronic communications can introduce malware into a computer system, and potentially damage or disrupt the computer, networks, or security settings.
5. Electronic communications can be forwarded, intercepted, circulated, stored or even changed without the knowledge of permission of Southlake or the patient.
6. Communications can be unintentionally misdirected, resulting in increased risk of being received by unintended and unknown recipients.

Do you have any questions with regards to the risks outlined above? **YES NO**

Do you consent to communicating with your care provider via email? **YES NO**

***Once verbal consent is obtained, the clinician or support staff shall make a note in the patients chart.*