

Email – Sending Secure Email	
Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)	
Prepared by: Head of Information Governance	
Presented to: Management of Information Group	Date: 09/09/2015
Ratified by: Management of Information Group	Date: 09/09/2015
	Review date: March 2016
Relating to policies:	Data Protection Policy Staff Code of Confidentiality Information Governance Policy Information Sharing Agreements NHS Mail

1. Purpose of this document

- 1.1. Emails sent from and to NHSmail accounts (...@nhs.net) or to other secure email systems (see icare) are protected to UK Government standards. This ensures that sensitive and confidential information is kept safe.
- 1.2. NHSmail now has an encryption feature which means that staff can communicate and send documents across organisational boundaries securely – in fact anyone using any email account including patients/clients.
- 1.3. When exchanging personal and sensitive confidential information, you should always be aware of Trust and local policies in relation to information governance, confidentiality and information sharing.
- 1.4. The purpose of this document is to provide staff with guidance on sending personal, sensitive and confidential information by email from their NHSmail account safely and securely. NHSmail users can securely exchange sensitive information with users of non-accredited or non-secure email services (e.g. ...@nhs.uk; @hotmail; @gmail; @yahoo, etc).

2. Scope of this SOP

- 2.1 This document applies to all staff, contractors, volunteers who have an NHSmail account and wish to use it to send personal, sensitive and confidential information across organisational boundaries or to named individuals.

3. Competencies required:

Not applicable

4. How to send an encrypted message

- 4.1 If using email to communicate with patients/clients, please ensure that you have gained their informed consent for using email to communicate with them. This consent should be clearly recorded in the care record.
- 4.2 Ensure you have the correct email address for the person you are intending to communicate with
- 4.3 Send the recipient the 'Encryption Guidance for Recipients' document which can be downloaded in a pdf formation from icare using your NHSmail account. The recipient will need to register for the encryption service and confirm to the sender this has been done. (see Appendix 1)
- 4.4. Use your NHSmail account to create an email message in the normal way.
- 4.5. Ensure the recipient's email address is correct
- 4.6. In the **Subject** field of the email, enter the word [secure] before the subject of the message (see below). The word secure **must** be surrounded by the square brackets for the message to be encrypted. If square brackets aren't used, the content of the email will be sent in plain text and could potential be a breach of confidentiality.



- 4.7. Compose the message
- 4.8. Add any required attachments (once initial registration process has taken place)
- 4.9 Click on **Send** to send the message. An unencrypted copy will be saved in your **Sent Items** folder.

The service will encrypt the message and deliver it to the intended recipient. Any replies will be received, decrypted and displayed as normal in your **Inbox**.

5 Good Practice

- 5.1 Before using the encryption feature, talk to the person you're sending to – make sure they're expecting the information and are ready to deal with it appropriately.

- 5.2 If you are sending information to a patient/client, gain consent from them before you communicate with them via NHSmail. Ensure they are registered for the service.
- 5.3 Use discreet email subject headers, for example 'confidential: for the attention of [NHS Number and/or person's name] only.
- 5.4 Email communications should be concise, clear and to the point
- 5.5 Avoid using clinical or social-care jargon or technical terms, unless you specifically know that the person who is receiving it fully understands them.
- 5.6 Emails are a written communication, and therefore are part of a care record and may be shared, so avoid inappropriate comments.
- 5.7 If the email needs to have the formality of a letter, you can achieve this by attaching a PDF rather than just email content.
- 5.8 Emails can be accidentally sent to the wrong person, so to avoid this
 - Make sure the address is correct – take care if using auto complete functions
 - Make sure only appropriate addresses are included when using 'reply to all' and 'forward'.

6 Benefits

- 6.1 NHSmail can be used to communicate securely with any email service;
- 6.2 NHSmail can send attachments to users of non-secure email service;
- 6.3 Trust can save money by replacing existing post and fax processes with email;
- 6.4 Users of non-accredited or insecure email services can communicate securely with NHSmail users saving time and money, speeding up communications and improving patient/client care;
- 6.5 Communication is faster, easier and more reliable.

7. Storage, Retention and Disposal of Emails

- 7.1 All emails that include personal and sensitive information or advice must be included in the care record. The sender and person receiving it should be included in the record together with the text of the email and the date.

- 7.2 All emails in relation to a client/patient that is either received or sent should be stored as outlined in point 7.1 and then deleted from the employees email account.
- 7.3 Emails that form part of the care records should be saved in the care record within 48 hours of receipt.

8. Monitoring tool:

Standards:

Item	%	Exceptions
Email communication with client/patient stored in care record within 48 hours.	100	none
Email communication with client/patient should contain the NHS Number	95	If new client and number unknown.

Equality Statement.

The Trust is committed to preventing discrimination, valuing diversity and achieving equality of opportunity. No person (staff, patient or public) will receive less favourable treatment on the grounds of the nine protected characteristics (as governed by the Equality Act 2010): Sexual Orientation; Gender; Age; Gender Reassignment; Pregnancy and Maternity; Disability; Religion or Belief; Race; Marriage and Civil Partnership. In addition to these nine, the Trust will not discriminate on the grounds of domestic circumstances, social-economic status, political affiliation or trade union membership.

The Trust is committed to ensuring all services, policies, projects and strategies undergo equality analysis. For more information about equality analysis and [Equality Impact Assessments](#) please refer to the [Equality and Diversity Policy](#)

References:

Health and Social Care Information Centre:

[Professional Record Standards Body for health and social care – Faster, better, safer communications \(using email in health and social care \(in England\)\)](#)

Amendment History

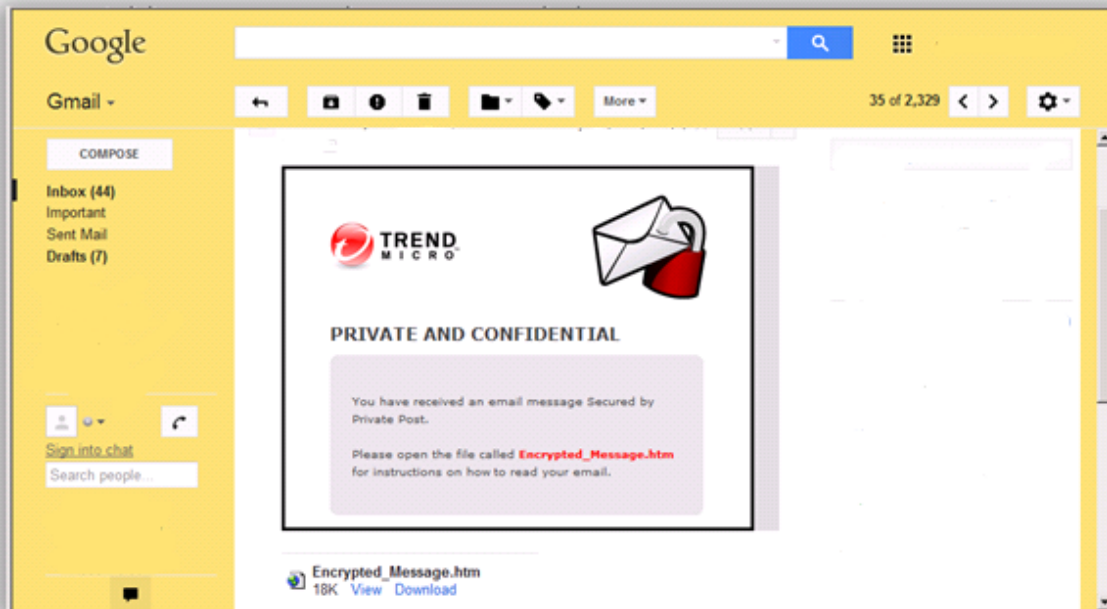
Issue	Status	Date	Reason for Change	Authorised

Appendix 1

Guidance for recipients of an encrypted NHSmail email

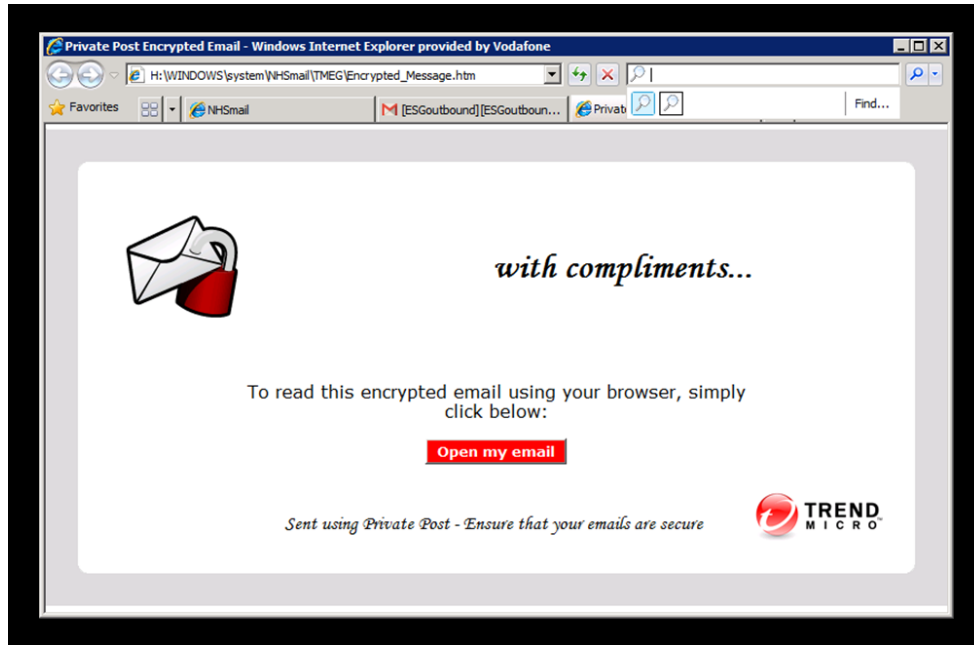
Note: It is not possible for anyone other than an NHSmail user to initiate an encrypted email exchange using the NHS Mail encryption feature.

When a member of staff uses the NHSmail encryption feature the recipient will receive an email like the example below.



The recipient can then open the file **Encrypted_Message.htm**. Their browser should allow them to either view the file directly or download and then open the file.

It is not necessary for them to install the Private Post Helper software to read encrypted emails.



If the patient/client has not previously received an encrypted NHSmail they will be directed to an external website which will guide them through the registration process to create an account.

A patient/client can reply to or forward encrypted emails. Their emails will be automatically encrypted. They can also attach a document to the email.

Full guidance on using the encryption service provided by NHSmail for recipients can be found at <https://web.nhs.net/Portal/InformationGuidanceServices/Handler.ashx?>

Appendix 2

Information for patient/clients

- When you send an email, write your full name and if possible, provide an identification number (preferably your NHS number), on a separate line in the body of the message. This makes it completely clear who the email is from. It is particularly important if your email address includes a nickname or partial name. Set up your signature to do this in a consistent way. Also provide another method by which they can contact you, for example a phone number.
- Do not send or receive emails that may contain confidential information if your email accounts, passwords or the communications stored on your own computer may be seen by others without your permission.
- Do not use email for urgent or emergency purposes, as the email may not be immediately acted on or read. For example when the person you are sending it to is out of the office or off duty.
- Do not send an email containing particularly sensitive information (medical or personal circumstances) unless you are sure the email system you are using to do this is secure. If you are unsure then contact the intended recipient to check.
- Do not send an email containing information about other people unless you are sure email addresses are secure and you have a specific responsibility or the permission of those other people to provide that information.