# Facsimile Transmission Policy and Guidelines Guidance Document

# Document Purpose and Overview

Fax machines, desktop fax software, fax modems, and fax servers/gateways are common business technologies used to transmit documents. Faxes can be sent from a fax machine to another fax machine or from a computer over telephone lines. It is prudent for the clinic to provide custodians and affiliates with guidelines to follow in order to maintain the privacy and security of health information when received and transmitted by fax. While it is common for practices to send health information via fax, there is a risk of inadvertent unauthorized disclosure of information when sending documents via fax.

# Instructions for use

The instructions below are meant to assist you with making this document your own and to fulfill your obligations under the Health Information Act. The document is created in a standard word document and can be edited to address the specific agreement needed:

* Please read the document carefully and ensure that all sections are relevant to your clinic and adjust as required.
* There are highlighted sections throughout the document to assist you in customizing your information. Please review these sections and make them specific to your clinic’s practice.
* The sections that are not highlighted are recommended to be part of your policy to support compliance with the Health Information Act. Please make sure you read and understand these sections.
* Please remove all highlighting as you fill out the relevant section and ensure that your clinic name is entered throughout the document, including the header.
* This document provides an opportunity to include your clinic’s guidelines about fax transmission. Common practices are provided as examples however, you will need to adapt these to your clinic processes.
* These policies currently have simple formatting and should be adapted to the clinic’s policy manual formatting.
* Determine the best way to communicate this policy with relevant team members and implement the policy.

# Privacy Training

The Alberta Medical Association offers privacy and security training to any Alberta community-based medical clinic. [Visit the AMA website today to learn more!](https://www.albertadoctors.org/leaders-partners/clinic-patient-privacy/privacy-training)

Facsimile Transmission Policy and Guidelines

# Policy Details

Creation Date: DATE Revision Date:

Applies to: All Employees and Contractors

Approved by: LEAD CUSTODIAN

## Purpose

This document provides guidelines for the clinic to follow in order to maintain the privacy and security of health information when received and transmitted by fax. While it is common for practices to send health information via fax, there is a risk of inadvertent unauthorized disclosure of information when sending documents via fax.

Unless the health information is required immediately and there is no other practical means of obtaining secure access to the information, custodians must find a more secure way to send the information**.**

The Health Information Act (HIA) section 60 requires custodians “to protect against reasonably anticipated threat or hazard to the security or integrity of health information or of loss of the health information.” Custodians must make a reasonable effort to ensure disclosures are made to the intended and authorized person and are accountability for unauthorized disclosures under the HIA.

## Acceptable Use of Fax - Policy and Guidelines

There are situations where the risks to patient care and safety clearly outweighs any potential privacy risk the custodian may face.

### Sending Information by Fax - Policy

The following items should be part of your policy as they will support your adherence to the HIA. Please read these carefully and ensure that they are communicated and implemented.

* Health information should only be transmitted by fax when necessary and there are no other reasonable options for sending the information in a secure and timely manner.
* Faxes of health information must be limited to the least amount of information necessary.
* Always complete a practice fax cover sheet, clearly identifying both sender and intended receiver of the information. The cover sheet should include a confidentiality notice warning that the information is intended for the named recipient only, as well as request the receiver to contact you immediately if the transmission was misdirected. Please refer to the breach management policy if this occurs.

### Sending Information by Fax - Guidelines

The following guidelines are commonly used in clinics. Please review the items below and add or adapt these suggestions to the specific steps that are followed when sending faxes in your clinic.

The insert clinic name follows these additional steps when sending faxes:

* Before sending a manual fax, check that the receiver’s number is correct, then verify in the machine’s display window that you have keyed it in correctly.
* It is recommended that where possible, the clinic confirms that a recipient has taken appropriate precautions to prevent anyone else from seeing the faxed documents (e.g., their fax is kept in a secure location, or they have someone watching the machine while in operation).
* Designating a role in the clinic as responsible for sending documents by fax will limit the chance that staff unfamiliar with the process will inadvertently fax information in an inappropriate manner. Consider a role within the clinic where the job duties align with the clinic's fax process.
* The clinic uses preprogramed fax numbers to reduce the chance that an incorrect number will be dialed when sending a fax. However, preprogrammed fax numbers that have been incorrectly entered or are no longer the fax number for the intended recipient, may lead to multiple misdirected faxes. Please indicate your policy for preprogrammed numbers and your process for ensuring that the numbers are correct.
* When possible, clinic staff will call ahead to ensure that the recipient is there to receive the fax or call afterwards to ensure they received the complete transmission. If neither is possible, clinic staff will check the confirmation sheet to see that it went to the correct number.
* When sending information by fax modem (a fax device contained in a computer), clinic staff must confirm that other users of the computer system cannot get access to the fax without a password.
* If possible, use encryption technology or other technology to secure fax transmissions.

### Receiving Information by Fax - Policy

The following items should be part of your policy as they will support your adherence to the HIA. Please read these carefully and ensure that they reflect your clinic’s current policies.

When faxing is necessary, custodians should follow these guidelines to reduce the risk of accidental disclosure when **receiving** information by fax, including:

* Limit your requests for health information transmitted by fax when necessary and there are no other reasonable options for receiving the information in a secure and timely manner.
* Security precautions should be taken for faxes received after normal office hours.
* If possible, use encryption technology or other technology to secure fax transmissions.

### Receiving Information by Fax - Guidelines

The following guidelines are commonly used in clinics. Please review the items below and add or adapt these suggestions to the specific steps that are followed when receiving faxes in your clinic.

The insert clinic name follows these additional steps when receiving faxes:

* Try to arrange a time to receive faxes containing personal information so you can be at the fax machine as they arrive.
* If your fax machine is equipped, use the feature requiring the receiver to enter a password before the machine will print the fax. This ensures that only the intended receiver can retrieve the document. Similarly, ask the sender to make sure you must supply a password to retrieve the document.
* If you are expecting information by fax modem (a fax device contained in a computer), ensure that other users of your system cannot access the information without a password.
* Be aware that your fax number can be reassigned once you have given up the number. It is possible to ‘purchase’ the rights to that line so that the number is never reassigned.