



Region of Waterloo

PUBLIC HEALTH AND  
EMERGENCY SERVICES

# How We Use and Protect Your Health Information



This pamphlet explains how The Region of Waterloo Public Health and Emergency Services (ROWPHE) uses and protects your personal health information. It also explains your options as a client as to how we manage your personal health information.



## What is personal health information?

It is information that identifies you and relates to your health or health care, including:

- your name, address, date of birth, substitute decision-maker and any information required to provide health care services
- details about your health and your health care history, including your Ontario Health Card number, services received at ROWPHE and your health record

## How do we use it?

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We are mandated by the Health Protection and Promotion Act to offer services that promote health and prevent disease. To provide some of these services, we need to collect your personal health information. Depending on the service you receive, we may also use your information for:

- paying for your treatment or care
- planning, delivering, and evaluating our services
- complying with legal requirements
- research, as approved by our Research Ethics Board
- notifying you about an appointment
- conducting client satisfaction surveys

Your personal health information will be shared with other health care providers only if they are involved in your health care.

There are times when we are legally allowed to collect or share your personal health information without your explicit agreement to do so. These times include:

- When the information is necessary for providing care and it is not reasonably possible for us to get your consent in a timely manner
- When there are reasonable grounds to believe that sharing your information is necessary to eliminate or reduce a significant risk of serious bodily harm to yourself or others
- A legal proceeding or pursuant to a summons, subpoena or court order
- Mandatory reporting under statutes, such as the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, the Health Protection and Promotion Act, or the Coroners Act.

## How do we protect it?

We are committed to protecting the privacy and confidentiality of your personal health information. We take reasonable steps to protect it from misuse, loss, unauthorized access, modification or disclosure. We comply with the Personal Health Information Protection Act, which is a law with rules for the collection, use and disclosure of personal health information.

As part of our role in protecting your personal health information:

- Our staff and agents must sign an annual confidentiality agreement. This outlines their obligation to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of your personal health information.
- We have privacy policies, and we educate our staff on these policies.
- Staff are trained annually on the appropriate use, disclosure and protection of personal health information.
- We have physical and technical safeguards to ensure our electronic systems and paper records are secure.
- We conduct privacy and security audits to ensure your personal health information is viewed only by people who need to see it for your care.
- We store and securely destroy paper and electronic records in accordance with our records management and retention procedures. Confidential waste material, such as personal health information no longer required to be stored, is put into secure shredding consoles or is disposed in a manner that ensures the confidentiality of the information.

## How do we store it?

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We use paper and electronic systems to store and access your personal health information. Here are some of the main electronic systems we currently use:

- **Practice Solutions Suite by TELUS Health:** For electronic medical records.
- **Ocean by CognisantMD:** For clients to electronically fill in intake and consent forms, and self-check-in for appointments.
- **Health Myself Patient Portal:** For e-booking, filling out forms, secure messaging between the clinic and client, text and email reminders for booked appointments.
- **Panorama:** Ontario's immunization information system to record and track student immunizations, exemptions and compliance with the Immunization of School Pupils Act and immunizations provided by public health staff at schools and clinics.
- **Oral Health Information Support System:** For our oral health and vision screening and surveillance. Also for claims administration for dental programs, such as Healthy Smiles Ontario.
- **Integrated Public Health Information System:** To report information on cases of reportable diseases to the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.
- **Integrated Services for Children Information System:** For the Healthy Babies Healthy Children Program, Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services.
- **Clinical Connect:** Real-time access to clients' electronic medical information from hospitals, home & community care services and Regional cancer programs.
- **Hedgehog Environmental Systems:** Used by our Public Health Inspectors for inspections of public facilities, case management and follow-up.
- **Ontario Laboratory Information Systems:** To send lab requests and receive lab reports/ results in electronic format.

If you have any questions about these systems, please speak with the person who provided your service, or our Health Information Management Program.



## What are my options?

We respect your right to decide how your personal health information is used or shared.

Unless we have a legal requirement to do so, you are allowed to refuse or withdraw your agreement to us collecting, using or disclosing your personal health information. To do so, please discuss with the person who has provided your service, or our Health Information Management Program. Please also note that you are not required to present your health card during a clinic visit. The collection of health card numbers is voluntary, and you have the right to receive services without providing a health card number.

If you decide to withhold your information, it may limit our ability to meet your needs.

## About Health Myself

Health Myself Patient Portal is a secure web-based communication portal used by the Region of Waterloo Public Health. Access to Health Myself is offered to you for free and may allow you to:

- communicate with your health care team for non-urgent matters
- book and manage your appointments online
- receive reminder emails of upcoming appointments
- receive resources, care plans and lab results

It is your choice to register. There will be no impact on the service you receive if you choose not to enroll.



## Security consideration

ROWPH is committed to protecting personal information and safeguarding the privacy of all its clients. To ensure secure transmission of your personal health information via Health Myself Portal, users are asked to avoid accessing and sharing information through a public Wi-Fi network. There are potential risks involved with using public Wi-Fi. Any encrypted data including your password, email and your personal health information sent through a public Wi-Fi network can be monitored and collected and you may be at risk of cyber attack. Always ensure that you are connected on a secure network before accessing your personal health information through Health Myself Portal.

## Notes about our services

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- Our **health promotion** services include the Healthy Babies Healthy Children program, dental services, voluntary immunizations and voluntary testing for sexually transmitted diseases. Because these services are voluntary, you have the option to give, withhold or withdraw your consent to us collecting, using or disclosing all or some of your personal health information needed to provide these services.
- Our **health protection** services require the collection of information about persons who are infected with designated communicable diseases, contact tracing and investigations related to disease and outbreak control and compiling immunization histories for school children. These services are mandated under the Health Protection and Promotion Act and other laws and normally require us by law to collect and share your personal health information. In other words, we are not required to obtain your consent to collect this information.

You have the right to request copies of your personal health records, and to request corrections to them. You also have the right to know who has viewed your personal health records, and you can do this by requesting a privacy audit. Please make your request to the person who provided your service, or to our Health Information Management Program.

For more information about our privacy practices, to make a request to view or correct your health record, to ask about a privacy audit or to raise a concern about our practices, please contact us:

**Health Information Management Program, Central Resources**

Region of Waterloo Public Health

99 Regina Street South

Waterloo, ON, N2J 4V3

Telephone: 519-575-4400 | TTY: 519-883-2427

Email: [ROWPHEPrivacy@regionofwaterloo.ca](mailto:ROWPHEPrivacy@regionofwaterloo.ca)

If you are not satisfied with our service, you have the right to address complaints and concerns to the Information and Privacy Commissioner's office of Ontario:

**Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario**

2 Bloor Street East Suite 1400

Toronto, ON M4W 1A8

Telephone: 416-326-33-33 | TTY: 1-800-387-0073

[info@ipc.on.ca](mailto:info@ipc.on.ca) | [www.ipc.on.ca](http://www.ipc.on.ca)