



Connecting for Health

NHSmail guidance

Introduction

Can I access NHSmail from home? Can I access NHSmail on my Blackberry? I'm happy with my current email provider, why should I switch? These are some of the questions about NHSmail the BMA has been asked by members and as the service has recently undergone significant changes we thought it would be timely to produce a joint guidance note on the NHS email and directory service.

NHSmail

NHSmail is an email service provided by the NHS for staff in England and Scotland - it is also available to medical students. If you are a medical academic you can also register for an NHSmail account providing that you have a legitimate need to communicate with the NHS concerning NHS patients or other sensitive NHS data. It is free to register and you can send emails, text or fax messages free of charge from your NHSmail account. Your NHSmail address will stay the same throughout your NHS career so it will not change when you move jobs within the NHS - this is particularly beneficial for staff who regularly move between different organisations, such as junior doctors and for those who work for more than one organisation.

NHSmail is the only NHS email system accredited for the secure transfer of clinical data. This means that you can email clinical information to colleagues, who have NHSmail accounts, without the need for additional encryption.

The service includes a directory containing the contact details of over one million NHS staff so if you want to find contact details for a member of staff you can search him/her on the directory by name, organisation or email address. It also includes a calendar, which can be made visible to other NHSmail users; helpful when setting up meetings or trying to catch a colleague between meetings.

Another benefit is that NHSmail shared mailboxes can be used in place of faxes, speeding up the communications process whilst removing the risk of information being read by someone it is not intended for. The owner of the mailbox can restrict who has access to it, ensuring data remains secure and an audit trail is left when read receipts are used.

NHSmail accepts that the service will be used for a variety of purposes. It can be used in relation to private patients and for social emails provided that this does not contravene local policies.

A new improved NHSmail

NHSmail has recently undergone significant changes following a migration of all existing NHSmail accounts to Microsoft Exchange 2007. This has delivered:

- Better integration with other devices and services and improved resilience.
- Improved usability, for example drag and drop, easier navigation between screens.
- A new feature rich service based on Microsoft Outlook Web Access 2007, with vastly improved calendar and contact features, representing the gold standard in functionality.
- Improved mobile working with full 'push' email and automatic synchronisation, replacing the previous need to manually download email to the device.
- Increased security - a new internet login process guards against 'keyboard logging' viruses; an option to indicate that you are using a public computer ensures sensitive data is not downloaded and left on public computers for others to find and mobile security has been improved with the implementation of a remote wipe facility for lost devices and an automatic handset time lock feature.

Some doctors have reported difficulties configuring NHSmail following the migration, which local Trust/PCT IT departments should be able to resolve. Local PCTs and Trusts have been issued with guidance and a campaign to ensure that Local Organisation Administrators (LOAs) have the resources and tools required to support clinicians in using NHSmail is underway. If you are still experiencing problems you should contact your LOA, in the first instance, the NHSmail Help Desk (0333 200 1133) and if you are still not happy the NHSmail team at NHS Connecting for Health via feedback@nhs.net



Accessing your NHSmail account

You can access your NHSmail account from any N3 or internet connection at work, home, on the move or even whilst overseas.

It is possible to access NHSmail from over 200 'off the shelf' mobile devices, including the iPhone, by using the Microsoft Exchange Active Sync (EAS) protocol; a programme which allows users to transfer documents, calendars, contact lists and emails between desktop computers and a mobile device. It is also possible to use a BlackBerry on NHSmail - as the BlackBerry does not support EAS 'out of the box', users must purchase software to connect to the service (as an example - <http://www.nhs.notifysync.co.uk>). You can also use NHSmail on an Apple Mac.

Security

NHSmail is much more secure than generally available webmail accounts. The service uses technology to constantly monitor for any potential security breaches at all levels of the system i.e. network, server and individual applications. These technologies include firewalls, intrusion detection systems and tripwire agents. NHSmail is housed in two secure data centres - this ensures that if one data centre experiences difficulties the other data centre will take over. It also means that a backup can always be provided if you lose any of your emails.

Some Trusts have chosen to block access to web-based email accounts due to concerns about security and viruses. Having an NHSmail account provides a solution; NHSmail implements a multi-layered Anti Virus/Anti Spam infrastructure and over 20 million inbound spam emails are blocked every day.

Each email is encrypted during transition removing the need for you to encrypt it yourself when sending to another NHSmail account. Security protection is also in place when using mobile devices including encrypted traffic to the device, the ability to remotely wipe the device to prevent unauthorised access to the data if the device is lost, an enforced screen lock after 20 minutes of inactivity and an enforced power-on PIN.

Your actions when using email are just as important in protecting data as the technology itself. When sending sensitive information you should:

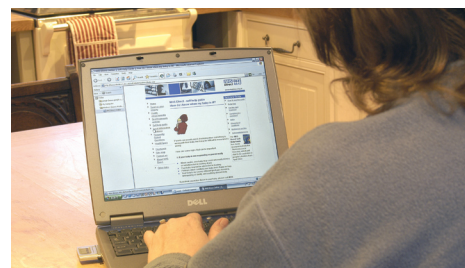
- Ensure that the recipient knows what information is being sent, what it is for and you should agree how that information will be treated.
- Ensure that the information will not be visible or accessible by other people, for example, the receiving computer should not be a shared terminal and should be password protected.
- Request a delivery and read receipt to ensure that the information has been received safely.
- Double check that you have the correct contact details when sending emails, text messages or faxes - this can be done by using the NHS Directory.



Information governance

You are responsible for ensuring that emails sent to you are acted upon, particularly when you receive clinical information. Failure to act upon clinical information could affect the care of a patient therefore it is important that you have procedures in place to manage the information you receive via email. You should:

- Ensure that procedures are in place to deal with incoming emails when you are on leave. It is possible to give colleagues access to your inbox and you can also auto-forward emails to other NHSmail users.
- Ensure that arrangements are in place for dealing with emails received by locums or staff on short term contracts.
- Ensure that responsibility for dealing with emails in shared inboxes is clearly defined.
- Ensure that clinical information received via email is transferred promptly to the patient's health record otherwise others caring for the patient may act upon incomplete information.
- Ensure that your inbox stays within the maximum size limit to avoid emails bouncing back to the sender. Quotas were imposed on accounts before migrations to the new NHSmail service began in January 2009. This was necessary to reduce costs and keep the amount of data that would need to be moved to the new service to a minimum. Quotas are implemented on an organisational basis and have been set at 200Mb for the majority of users. This is the industry standard for a corporate email service. If you feel that you have an exceptional case for an increased quota you should contact your local organisation¹. The NHSmail team hope to increase quota sizes in the future and in the meantime your local organisation should have processes in place to ensure that you can file documents outside of the email system.



NHS Connecting for Health is currently developing 'Mystaffspace' an NHS portal which will enable one point of access to systems including NHSmail.

Registering for an NHSmail account

You can register for an NHSmail account at: <https://www.nhs.net> where you will be provided with step by step instructions. You must be connected to the NHS network / N3 to register. Organisations that wish to sign up to NHSmail should email: feedback@nhs.net

Further information

Further information including links to training demonstrations is available on the NHS Connecting for Health website at: <http://www.connectingforhealth.nhs.uk/nhsmail>

¹ Organisations can implement quotas on the following allocation: 2% of users 1GB, 3% of users 500Mb, 80% of users 200Mb and 15% of users 50Mb.