

[News story: Matt Hancock: email must replace paper in the NHS](#)

Email is as secure and cheaper than communicating through paper and fax machines, the Health and Social Care Secretary said in a speech at an NHS England conference.

He outlined an ambition for healthcare staff to email patients directly with information on appointments to reduce delays, boost cyber security and cut wastage.

NHS organisations will be able to use any secure email provider – not just NHS Mail – if it meets the required security settings. This is so that NHS organisations can choose the best service for their needs and email providers are encouraged to innovate.

The move is part of Matt Hancock's [tech vision](#) for helping NHS organisations to introduce innovative technologies for the benefit of staff and patients.

Digital services and IT systems will soon have to meet a clear set of open standards to ensure they can talk to each other across organisational boundaries and can be continuously upgraded.

Any system that does not meet these standards will be phased out and the government will look to end contracts with providers that do not understand these principles for the health and care sector.

The Health and Social Care Secretary announced a [fax machine ban](#) in December 2018. Fax machines have now been removed from the NHS Supply Chain so trusts can no longer buy them.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

Having to deal with outdated technology is hugely frustrating for staff and patients alike – and in many cases downright dangerous. A letter lost in the post could be the difference between life and death.

We have signalled the end of archaic fax machines in hospitals and GP practices, and as of this year the NHS will no longer buy them. Our mission now is to make it as easy as possible for GPs to communicate safely and securely with their patients and colleagues.

There is no reason why a doctor cannot email a patient confidentially, for example with their test results or prescription, rather than make them wait days for a letter or ask them to come into the surgery. The rest of the world runs on email – and the NHS should too.

Mr Richard Kerr, Chair of the Royal College of Surgeons Commission on the Future of Surgery, said:

Last year, work undertaken for the RCS's Commission on the Future of Surgery revealed that NHS hospital trusts own over 8,000 fax machines. This is ludicrous.

We know that digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence, genomics and imaging for healthcare, are going to play an increasingly important role in how we deliver patient care.

It is therefore imperative that the NHS uses modern communication channels that are up to the job of transmitting vast amounts of personalised patient information quickly and securely.

The RCS fully supports the health secretary's ban on fax machines in the NHS.