

# The Mass HIway: Fact Sheet for Patients



**T**he Mass HIway is a secure statewide computer network that allows your healthcare providers to safely and quickly send your health information to where it is most needed. A doctor or nurse can care for you better when he or she has important information about your health history. The Mass HIway is designed to make this safer and faster. The goal is better care coordination and quality for you and your family.

## What is the Mass HIway?

- Mass HIway is a secure statewide computer network that can help healthcare providers coordinate your care. It is a new tool that can be used to:
  - » Locate other members of your healthcare team
  - » Securely request, send, and receive your health information
- It's voluntary. State Law requires all healthcare organizations get patient consent (by signing a consent form) before they may use the Mass HIway for that patient's care.
- The Mass HIway is managed by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS).

## How does the Mass HIway help me?\*

- If you are in an accident or have a sudden illness and go to the emergency room, the hospital might not know your medical history. The emergency room doctor can use the Mass HIway to find out if you are allergic to any medicines or if you have other health problems.

- If you were discharged from the hospital and are going for a follow-up appointment, the hospital can use Mass HIway to send your doctor a note about your hospital stay. Then, you and your doctor could spend time talking about your follow-up care instead of paperwork.
- If you get tests done, the doctor can use the Mass HIway to send the results to other members of your healthcare team, like your specialist. This helps them coordinate your care. It can also save you time and money by reducing the need for repeat tests.
- If you have a chronic condition your health insurer case manager can use the Mass HIway to communicate with your doctors to coordinate your care and help you stay healthy.
- If you see a new doctor, he or she can use the Mass HIway to locate other organizations where you have received care. Your new doctor can request your health information so they can treat you better.

- \* Remember, the Mass HIway is a new tool, so all of your providers may not be using it yet. There will be more benefits for you as more healthcare organizations use the Mass HIway.

## Who can use the Mass HIway and why?

- Mass HIway may only be used by healthcare organizations (like doctors' offices, clinics, hospitals, public health agencies, and health insurers).
- Mass HIway may only be used for information sharing as allowed by law (to plan treatment, to get payment from insurance companies, and operations, like reporting care quality). Speak to your doctor or office staff about what information is sent and why.

## Does the Mass HIway store my health information?

- No. The patient's medical record itself is **not** part of the Mass HIway system. The Mass HIway cannot see any health information sent over the network. The medical record is stored by the healthcare organization, the same way it is today.

## What happens when I give my consent?

- **With your consent, you allow** the healthcare organization to send the following information about you to the Mass Hlway to be stored in a secure database. This data is used to search for other healthcare organizations that have health information about you for request.
  - » full name
  - » date of birth
  - » home address
  - » e-mail
  - » phone number
  - » gender
  - » medical record number
- **With your consent, you allow** your relationship to that organization to be listed in the Mass Hlway network. A relationship means that you have received care at that organization and have given consent to that organization to use the Mass Hlway. Your relationship can only be seen by other organizations where you have given consent.
- **With your consent, you allow** healthcare providers or other health workers at that organization to use Mass Hlway to request, send, and receive health information about you for your care. Examples of other health workers could be a lab technician or someone in the medical records office. Speak with your doctor or the office staff about who is using the Mass Hlway at that organization.

## What if I say 'No' or don't sign the consent form? What if I change my mind?

- That's ok. But, if you do not consent for the Mass Hlway, **your providers will continue to send your health information using other ways**, like fax or the mail. But that takes time and it's hard to control who reads a fax or opens a piece of mail, so your information may not always be protected. **The Mass Hlway is designed to make this safer and faster.**
- Each healthcare organization will have its own process for you to change your choice, so speak with your doctor or the office staff to learn how.

## How does the Mass Hlway protect my information?\*

The Mass Hlway has security measures in place to protect your information that aren't true of current methods, like fax, mail, or portable media like a CD or USB (flash drive), such as:

- Using a special code so that only authorized providers can read the information sent over the Mass Hlway (this is known as encrypting data).
- Encrypting the Mass Hlway database of demographic information, and keeping it behind a firewall (this prevents access by the wrong people).

- Having a way to oversee who has access to the system and who has used it for a particular patient's healthcare. You can get a copy of this list by speaking with your provider or the office staff and asking for an "accounting of disclosures".
- A user must have valid usernames and strong passwords.
- All healthcare organizations using the Mass Hlway have signed a contract to make sure they follow all state and federal laws to protect your information.
- You will still need to give special permission for providers to request and receive certain sensitive information. This includes HIV and genetic testing results and substance abuse.
- \* There is always a risk with technology, but the Mass Hlway uses the highest security standards to protect your information. Most of the data breaches you hear about are from insecure laptops being lost, or information being sent without encryption (coding), like a CD or a USB (flash drive). The Mass Hlway can help replace these methods.



## How do I get more information?

- Talk with your doctor or their office staff about how they are using the Mass Hlway.
- Visit [www.masshiway.net](http://www.masshiway.net), email us at [Masshiway@state.ma.us](mailto:Masshiway@state.ma.us), or call 1-855-MAHlway (Option 3).

