



AMERICAN OPTOMETRIC ASSOCIATION

FAQ–Digital Contact Information

Q–What do doctors need to do?

A–Doctors of optometry should enter “digital contact information” into the National Plan and Provider Enumeration System (NPPES). The NPPES is your NPI (National Provider Identifier) file.

Source–[cms.gov/outreach-and-education/outreachffsprovpartprogprovider-partnership-email-archive/2021-10-07-mlnc#_Toc84424561](https://www.cms.gov/outreach-and-education/outreachffsprovpartprogprovider-partnership-email-archive/2021-10-07-mlnc#_Toc84424561)

Q–What is “digital contact information”?

A–Digital contact information is a health information exchange “Endpoint” such as your Direct Message address that allows health care providers to send authenticated, encrypted health information directly to trusted recipients securely over the internet. Endpoints also include FHIR server URL, or query endpoint.

Source–[cms.gov/outreach-and-education/outreachffsprovpartprogprovider-partnership-email-archive/2021-10-07-mlnc#_Toc84424561](https://www.cms.gov/outreach-and-education/outreachffsprovpartprogprovider-partnership-email-archive/2021-10-07-mlnc#_Toc84424561)

Q–What are “Endpoints”?

A–Endpoints are a Direct Message address (or related URL), not a personal email address. Endpoints provide a simple and secure way for participants to send authenticated, encrypted health information directly to known, trusted recipients over the internet. Endpoints can be used to exchange health information between health care entities (primary care physicians, specialists, hospitals, labs, etc.). Endpoints also include FHIR server URL, or query endpoint.

Source–nppes.cms.hhs.gov/webhelp/nppeshelp/HEALTH%20INFORMATION%20EXCHANGE.html

Q–What is a “Direct Message Address”?

A–The main purpose of a Direct address is for providers to exchange health information with each other over the internet in a standardized, secure manner. In general, “Direct” is a technical standard for exchanging health information between health care organizations. Direct is similar to email, but different in important ways. For example, Direct messages are authenticated and encrypted in a specific way to ensure that data are sent and received only by authorized parties.

Direct addresses are available from a variety of sources, including electronic health record (EHR) vendors, State Health Information Exchange entities, regional and local Health Information Exchange entities, as well as private service providers offering Direct exchange capabilities called Health Information Service Providers (HISPs).

Source—[cms.gov/about-cms/health-informatics-and-interopability-group/faqs#118](https://www.cms.gov/about-cms/health-informatics-and-interopability-group/faqs#118)

Q—Why do we need to do this?

A—Digital contact “Endpoints” provide a simple and secure way for participants to send authenticated, encrypted health information directly to known, trusted recipients over the internet. Entering digital contact information is voluntary but CMS plans to publicly report providers missing digital contact information.

Source—[cms.gov/outreach-and-education/outreachffsprovpartprogprovider-partnership-email-archive/2021-10-07-mlnc#_Toc84424561](https://www.cms.gov/outreach-and-education/outreachffsprovpartprogprovider-partnership-email-archive/2021-10-07-mlnc#_Toc84424561)

Q—How do we do this?

A—See slides 29-34 here: nppes.cms.hhs.gov/assets/How_to_apply_for_an_NPI_online.pdf

Source—nppes.cms.hhs.gov/webhelp/nppeshelp/HEALTH%20INFORMATION%20EXCHANGE.html

Q—What if doctors don’t do this?

A—This step is voluntary. However, in the May 2020 [CMS Interoperability and Patient Access final rule](#), CMS finalized the policy to publicly report the names and National Provider Identifiers of providers who don’t have digital contact information included in the National Plan and Provider Enumeration System (NPPES).

Source—[cms.gov/outreach-and-education/outreachffsprovpartprogprovider-partnership-email-archive/2021-10-07-mlnc#_Toc84424561](https://www.cms.gov/outreach-and-education/outreachffsprovpartprogprovider-partnership-email-archive/2021-10-07-mlnc#_Toc84424561)

Q—Are doctors of optometry “providers” under this rule?

A—The types of providers and clinicians who should add their digital contact information into NPPES include physicians who have or are eligible for a type 1 (individual human being) NPI or type 2 (non-individual) NPI. According to CMS, providers and clinicians who should enter digital contact information in NPPES include:

- Physicians (including doctors of medicine, osteopathy, dental surgery, dental medicine, podiatric medicine, and optometry)

Source—[cms.gov/about-cms/health-informatics-and-interopability-group/faqs#118](https://www.cms.gov/about-cms/health-informatics-and-interopability-group/faqs#118)

Q–How can providers verify if they are among those who don’t have digital contact information included in the National Plan and Provider Enumeration System (NPES)?

A–Providers can verify if they are among those who have not uploaded their digital contact information into NPES as of March 31, 2022 by going to <https://data.cms.gov/provider-compliance/public-reporting-of-missing-digital-contact-information/data>. The database allows providers to search by name and export the results. If the provider is included in the database, they can still enter endpoints in NPES ([instructions begin on slide 29](#)) and organizations can also upload new or updated data elements in bulk format for their providers through the NPES [Electronic File Interchange \(EFI\) process](#). Providers who add endpoint information after March 2022 will be removed from the list in the next quarterly update planned for early July 2022.

Source–data.cms.gov/provider-compliance/public-reporting-of-missing-digital-contact-information

Q–Will patients or members of the public be able to contact a provider via a Direct Message address, since this information will be publicly available in NPES?

A–Direct is formatted slightly differently than personal email. There are some providers who use the Direct technology to communicate with their patients through their patient portals; however, the intent of this technology is not to serve as a regular email exchange for members of the public or patients.

Source–cms.gov/about-cms/health-informatics-and-interoperability-group/faqs#118