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## WHAT CLINICIANS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT ENCRYPTION

OntarioMD offers many [useful privacy and security resources](#) for clinicians that help them know what to do to protect their personal information and their patient data. In our [7 Tips to Protect You as You Navigate the World of Virtual Care](#), we provide some practical tips on protect your data. This Bulletin provides information about encryption.

We recommend that you seek assistance from your IT provider to assess your practice's encryption needs and implement encryption measures that will address them.

### What is encryption?

Encryption is the process of scrambling text to make it unreadable to unauthorized users. You can encrypt files, folders and the hard drive on your computer or your entire network, and you can also encrypt USB flash drives and files you may store in the cloud.

### Why should you encrypt your data?

Clinicians collect personal health information (PHI) that must be kept private and secure at all times as required under Ontario's *Personal Health Information Protection Act* (PHIPA). Practices can be held responsible if a computer or other device containing PHI is stolen or accessed inappropriately and the information is used for illegal purposes. If you encrypt your files or the most sensitive information on your hard drive, the PHI is protected.

Encrypting your hard drive doesn't protect your computer completely, but it does help to reduce your risk of data theft. A hacker can still access your computer over an insecure network connection in a public place, for example, or you might inadvertently click a malicious link in an email and infect your computer with malware that steals your usernames and passwords. Additional security, like anti-malware software, firewalls and training are all required to keep your data safe.





## Encryption Tips

- Before you encrypt your files on your computer, back up the files and create an image back-up, which is a duplicate of the contents of your computer's drive. You should also have your operating system's installation disk and create an emergency boot disk.
- Back up your computer regularly so if your disk crashes or becomes corrupted, you don't lose your files forever. A current back-up will let you quickly be up and running again.
- When you create a password or PIN, make it strong by using random letters, numbers and special characters, but also make it something you will be able to remember.
- It's hard to remember all your passwords, PINs and encryption keys so write them down and keep them in a safe place in case you forget them. If your hard drive is encrypted and you forget the password, you won't be able to access your computer nor can anyone else, including your IT support.
- Use Wi-Fi Protected Access 2 (WPA2) for your Wi-Fi to protect your wireless network. Don't use Wired Equivalent Privacy (WEP), which is not safe.
- Use a virtual private network (VPN) to access the office's network from your laptop or mobile device when you're working remotely. A VPN provides security over the Internet, encrypting the data you send and receive during your VPN session.

Encryption is essential for protecting PHI and is part of a bigger picture for protecting your files, computer drive and your emails from theft and malicious cyber attacks. Your IT provider will be able to help you implement a plan to protect your practice and your patient data with effective tools. You can also get a good understanding of privacy and security best practices by completing OntarioMD's complimentary [Privacy & Security Training Module](#). Family physicians and specialists can earn two continuing medical education credits upon completion. The module is also a good educational tool for your practice staff.

If you have any questions about privacy and security and your practice, please contact [support@ontariomd.com](mailto:support@ontariomd.com) and one of our experienced staff will be able to assist you. OntarioMD staff can help you ensure that you have a plan and the tools in place to protect your practice.

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