PURPOSE

Any document that contains protected health information (PHI) is confidential and must be protected with appropriate measures. When documents with PHI that are sent from one location to another are lost, misplaced, or mis-delivered, there is a higher risk of exposure if documents do not include cautions and full contact information. This policy provides guidance to staff and providers who in the course of their responsibilities must send confidential protected health information through interoffice mail, US mail, other mail, and by fax transmission.

SCOPE

The policy applies to all individuals working in the San Francisco Department of Public Health.

POLICY

It is the policy of the San Francisco Department of Public Health to safeguard the client’s protected health information at all times. Each individual is responsible for securing the delivery of PHI through interoffice mail, US mail, other mail, and by fax transmission. Any unauthorized disclosure, copying, use, or distribution of PHI may subject to civil or criminal penalties under state and federal privacy laws.

Substance abuse federal regulations [42 C.F.R., part 2] require that substance abuse treatment programs sending documents containing PHI to a third party must attach a statement that the documents may not be re-disclosed without authorization from the client.

PROCEDURE

1. Delivery of PHI through Interoffice Mail, US Mail, and Other Mail
   A. Mailed PHI should be limited to the minimum necessary to accomplish the intended purpose
   B. Employee must complete and attach cover sheet (Protected Health Information Cover Sheet Required for Fax Transmissions, Interoffice Mail, US Mail & Other Mail) on documents that contain PHI
   C. Packet must be contained in a sealed envelope

2. Transmission of PHI through Facsimile (fax)
   A. Faxed PHI should be limited to the minimum necessary to accomplish the intended purpose
   B. At a minimum, employee must:
      i. confirm fax number is correct and inform the recipient regarding the fax
      ii. complete and attach cover sheet (Protected Health Information Cover Sheet Required for Fax Transmissions, Interoffice Mail, US Mail & Other Mail) on documents that contain PHI
      iii. Stand by the fax machine until the entire document has been transmitted