

About PACS:
How was information handled before PACS?

Prior to the introduction of PACS, there was no provincial source of patient digital imaging records for health care providers to use when making decisions about a patient's care. Films or images were archived in the facility that the exam was completed in and transported individually to specialists and physicians for viewing. At times, having files stored in a different location led to repeat images being taken. The PACS archive will enable authorized care providers to view images taken previously, to be compared to recent images, providing a more complete clinical history and eliminating the need to transport hard-copy films.

What tests will be a part of PACS?

Services typically performed in diagnostic imaging departments will be stored in PACS including: general X-ray; ultrasound; computed tomography (CT); magnetic resonance imaging (MRI); nuclear medicine; bone density; lithotripsy (non-invasive treatment of kidney stones and stones in the gallbladder or in the liver); angio/interventional (use of x-rays and contrast dyes to diagnose) and diagnostic mammography at selected sites.

Which health regions will be adopting PACS?

All health regions in the province will be adopting the provincial PACS solution. This includes provincial, regional, district, and northern hospitals. Thus far, PACS has been implemented in Saskatoon, Humboldt, Prince Albert, Lloydminster, North Battleford, Swift Current, Moose Jaw, Yorkton, and La Ronge. Upcoming implementations include Regina, and hospitals in the Heartland and Kelsey Trail Health Regions. Private clinics in the province provide important, additional services to the health regions, and will be included in future implementation planning.

Authorized radiologists and point of care providers will have secure access via the internet to all diagnostic images and reports in the PACS.

If you have questions about PACS, please contact:

Saskatchewan Health
eHealth Privacy Service
Suite 360, 10 Research Drive
Regina, Saskatchewan S4S 7J7

1-800-667-1672
www.health.gov.sk.ca/pacs
privacyandaccess@ehealthsask.ca



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Improved Access to Digital Imaging in Saskatchewan

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The Saskatchewan Picture Archiving
and Communication System (PACS)

Improved Access to Digital Imaging in Saskatchewan

The Saskatchewan Picture Archiving and Communication System (PACS) program will improve the health and safety of Saskatchewan residents by providing authorized health care professionals (e.g. radiologists, surgeons and physicians) with confidential access to patients' digital imaging records.

PACS is a secure computer system designed for the storage, retrieval and display of diagnostic images, like X-rays, MRI and CT scans. They can be transmitted from health care treatment facilities across the province over Saskatchewan's secure high-speed computer network, CommunityNet.

Benefits for residents include improvement of service in rural areas, decreased waiting times between tests and results, the elimination of the need to transport films between locations, and enhanced patient safety. Authorized family physicians and specialists will be able to access diagnostic images online at any time and from any location, which will mean faster results and treatment for their patients.

PACS joins the Pharmaceutical Information Program (PIP) as one of the first components of a provincial electronic health record.



Privacy and Security:
Is my personal health information safe and confidential?

Personal health information is confidential and the regional health authorities (RHAs) and Saskatchewan Health take great care to protect personal health information. Information is kept in strict confidence and is used or disclosed as authorized or required by law. Privacy safeguards outlined in *The Health Information Protection Act* (HIPA) apply to PACS.

The following safeguards are in place to ensure only health professionals involved in an individual's care can access personal health information in PACS:

- All health care providers are made aware of their responsibilities and agree to maintain the confidentiality of information and use it only on a need-to-know basis.
- All access to PACS data is tracked and recorded for audit purposes. Individuals can request a printout of who has accessed their information in PACS.
- Patients are able to mask their PACS record.

In addition, strict security safeguards are also in place. There are policies, practices and computer systems that are designed to protect information from unauthorized use, error and loss. User access is restricted to authorized health care professionals only. In addition, high-quality network security is in place, and all electronic messages are encrypted.

What personal health registration information is collected by PACS?

To identify digital images, the following information is collected:

- Registration information including name, address, gender, date of birth, health services number and medical records number.
- Information about the type of diagnostic imaging exam requested by the physician and the name of the physician.

If I don't want my personal diagnostic imaging information viewed or shared by health professionals, what do I do?

While there are many benefits to PACS, we recognize that some people may not be comfortable with the electronic sharing of their personal health information between authorized health care providers. Saskatchewan residents may choose a masking option (request that diagnostic imaging information be masked and made unavailable for view). Individuals who choose this option should call the eHealth Privacy Service at 1-800-667-1672 for more information. A masking form is available by mail or a Request to Mask Form can be downloaded from the Saskatchewan Health website www.health.gov.sk.ca/pacs. Once the form has been completed, signed and returned to the eHealth Privacy Service the form will be processed and the PACS records will be marked as masked.

When authorized health care professionals log into the PACS application and select a record that is masked, the health care professional will be prevented from seeing any diagnostic imaging information, except in these circumstances:

- With consent: At any time, an individual may give a health care provider (such as a physician) consent to view masked information.
- In an emergency, when a person is unable to provide consent: This would allow a health care provider to access the history in an emergency, such as if a person is unconscious or unable to provide consent due to illness. The information could be life-saving in these circumstances.
- When an authorized radiologist requires access to report on a procedure.
- When an authorized technologist requires access in order to complete a procedure.

All access to masked information is tracked including the time and date of the access, name of the health care provider accessing the information and the reason for accessing the information.

My health care provider refused to help me because I have taken steps to prevent my diagnostic imaging information from being accessed and viewed when I requested my PACS information be masked. Does he/she have that right?

Yes. If, in a health care provider's professional opinion, they cannot recommend a particular course of treatment because all of the patient's history cannot be accessed, a health care provider may refuse to provide or recommend treatment. An individual may give an authorized health care provider consent to view diagnostic imaging information. This would still ensure that the record remained masked and unavailable to other users.

What happens if I want my images to be viewed after I have masked them?

Individuals may provide consent to an authorized health care professional to view masked PACS information.

If choosing to reverse the decision to mask PACS information, please visit the Saskatchewan Health website www.health.gov.sk.ca/pacs and download a Request to Remove the Mask form. For individuals without web access, please call 1-800-667-1672 for a Request to Remove the Mask form to be sent by mail. When the request has been received and processed, the PACS records will be available for authorized health care providers to access as needed.

Can I find out who has accessed my diagnostic images and reports?

Yes. Individuals may request a report of who has accessed their PACS information. Please visit the Saskatchewan Health website www.health.gov.sk.ca/pacs and download the form to request a report on who has accessed their diagnostic images. Individuals without web access may call 1-800-667-1672 and request a form to sign from eHealth Saskatchewan. Once the request has been received and processed, a report will be sent by return mail.

What happens if a facility loses some of its equipment (hardware)?

If a facility loses computer hardware through theft, fire or another circumstance, there is no security risk to the information in PACS. The data is not stored on laptops or computer workstations that are accessing the PACS. All patient diagnostic imaging information is stored on highly secure servers in the custody and control of the regional health authorities (RHAs) supported by Saskatchewan Health, so that only authorized users can look at the information and/or print a copy of the information for their files.

The database is well protected by using industry standard technical, administrative and physical safeguards, which ensure only authorized users who have a need to know may access the centrally stored system. Policies and practices for users and administrators are also in place to ensure personal health information is protected.



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