

MDH POLICY

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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY – Office of Communications

MDH POLICY 01.04.02

Effective Date: March 26, 2018

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy establishes the guidelines of acceptable use of social media by Maryland Department of Health (MDH) employees, including creation of official sites and participation in public sites. The Department recognizes that many of its employees actively participate in social media and that such channels offer a way to easily share information about the Department, its mission, and values. Participation in online communities can promote better communication with colleagues and constituents. Participation may include, but is not limited to, the following social media platforms: online forums, blogs, wikis, and social networks. Current examples of social media platforms include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, and LinkedIn. Communications within these platforms need to be consistent with Department policies, guidelines, and standards.

The Department expects that employees engaging in social media while representing the Department will be mindful that their postings impact the Department's reputation and its interests. Given the sensitive nature of the information the Department handles and the regulatory framework in which it operates, the Department must also ensure that its employees understand and adhere to basic policies regarding the responsible and lawful use of social media.

This Social Media Policy is intended to help protect the Department and its employees from legal, reputational, and other risks that may arise from posting information, engaging users, and participating in related online actions specific to the Department.

To simplify official social media strategies and efforts for the Department, the Office of Communications stands as a resource to help promote the policies, programs, and campaigns of the Administrations housed within the Department. Coordinating posts to be executed by the Office of Communications remains an alternative to establishing and managing social media accounts associated with individual Administrations.

Maryland Department of Health

OFFICE OF REGULATION AND POLICY COORDINATION (ORPC)

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POLICY

A. DEFINITIONS

1. Department Resource—Computers, cell phones, wired and wireless devices, networks and bandwidth paid for by the Department and made available to employees to perform their job responsibilities on behalf of the Department.
2. Social Media Platforms—Platforms include, but are not limited to: online forums, blogs, wikis, and social networks. Current examples of social media platforms include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, and LinkedIn. The Office of Communications can add Department videos to the State YouTube channel.
3. Personal Social Media Activities—Accessing or posting information to a social media site not related to the performance of an individual's job responsibilities for the Department.
4. Program Owner—A Program Owner is the person responsible for monitoring and maintaining online social media content related to the Department.
5. Account Creator—Person managing the account. They should follow best practices in selecting, maintaining, and updating passwords. Please contact the Office of Information Technology (OIT) department for further clarification of those best practices.

B. POLICY GUIDELINES

1. Communications should be consistent with the Department's brand, mission, vision, values, policies, and applicable laws.
2. Communications in online communities should never contain information that identifies Non-public Personal Information (NPI). A social media account is not the appropriate portal for managing a customer's business. When alerted to a customer's personal inquiry, get his or her contact information and have the appropriate Administration follow up by phone or by email. NEVER post NPI on social media, via direct message, or otherwise disclose it in a public forum. NPI includes such obvious topics as: Health information, Social Security numbers, credit card data, phone numbers, and addresses.
3. Employees should always be respectful of others in posts and discussions. Never use ethnic slurs, personal insults, sarcasm, obscenities, or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable in the Department's workplace. Employees should show consideration for others' privacy.

4. Enforcement—If an employee violates this policy, the Department may require the employee to edit, correct, or remove an online post or comment. The employee may also be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment, per COMAR 17.04.05.04. If an employee witnesses or identifies violations of this policy while online, the employee is asked to notify the Office of Communications.
5. Employees will be held personally liable for defamatory or libelous commentary.
6. Employees should avoid topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory, such as politics or religion. Employees are encouraged to use sound judgement in ensuring program messaging does not conflict with broader messaging from the current administration.
7. Department resources including email and Internet access are provided to support the Department's business. While employees are given access to these tools at work, they may not make extensive personal use of them. Access privileges may be revoked, or other disciplinary actions may be taken if employees are found to be abusing their Internet privileges.
8. Photographs, recordings, and live streaming are prohibited without consent from both the subject and from the Office of Communications.

C. PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS

1. This policy does not authorize individuals to use social media for personal reasons during working time or while using work resources.
2. The Department respects the rights of employees use of social media for personal reasons, using their own resources, and on their own time. People who use social media for personal reasons must not create the impression that they represent the opinion or the position of the Department. If employees acknowledge their relationship with the Department in an online community, they must include disclaimers in their communications stating that they are not speaking officially on behalf of the Department.
3. Every employee is personally responsible for his/her posts written, audio, video, or otherwise.
4. Employees must use a personal email address, not a Department email address for personal social media activities.

If any of the following is found and brought to the Department's attention in an online commentary posted by a Department employee, it may be grounds for disciplinary action even if it occurs as part of an individual's personal use of social media:

- Posts that disclose confidential customer information or proprietary information
- Posts that are defamatory or libelous
- Posts that are threatening, harassing, abusive, or humiliating to another person

D. RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Human Resources

- a. Ensures that all employees are provided with information related to this policy
- b. Assists management in ensuring compliance with this policy
- c. Serves as a resource for management and employees in need of information
- d. Intervenes in situations where this policy is being violated

2. Office of Information Technology (OIT)

- a. Monitors and shuts down or restricts access if resources are being used in violation of this policy

E. DEPARTMENT SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

Managers who identify a business need to create an official Department social media account for their respective Administration or office must first have written approval from the Office of Communications. The written request should include:

- The desired Social Media Platforms
- The goals to be accomplished through the account's use
- The Program Owner
- The Account Creator
- The anticipated frequency of messaging
- Process for monitoring discussions and responding

Accounts must be set up using only an official Maryland.gov-domain email address and must have someone from the Office of Communications serve as an Administrator of the page.

F. DEPARTMENT MANAGED SOCIAL MEDIA BEST PRACTICES

1. Be Accurate—Maintain accuracy and be clear:

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- If posting or commenting about the Department, be sure that the post is easy to understand, timely, and truthful
 - Use citations when appropriate (where they are required by standard practice or where they can help facilitate the reader's understanding)
 - If a mistake is published, be sure to correct the mistake and provide any necessary clarifications in a transparent manner
 - Only share posts from verified sources or identified partners
2. Don't respond to everything—Sometimes the best response is none. If someone on social media is attacking the Department, bring the posts to the attention of the Office of Communications so they may determine appropriate action or response.
 3. Press Inquiries—Refer all inquiries from the press, including internet journalists and bloggers, to the Office of Communications.
 4. Videos—Make sure, if you are posting an original video that it has been approved by the Office of Communications.
 5. Facebook Live—If you would like to utilize the Facebook Live feature, please share the event, date, time, and location with the Office of Communications for approval.
 6. Blogs—If you are posting an original blog or opinion piece, it has to be approved by the Office of Communications.
 7. Legal Proceedings and Regulatory Actions—Never refer to or post information about any lawsuit, regulatory action, or other formal legal proceeding to which the Department is a party. Contact the Office of Communications about any social media attempts to solicit this type of information. The Office of Communications will contact the Department's counsel.
 8. Advertising—Posts may not advertise or promote private industry in any way.
 9. Political opinions or endorsements—Avoid posting content that is political. For example, an employee should not take a stance that the Department believes fracking should be banned, etc. The employee can state the facts and the science but should refrain from opinions on political issues. Never use Department accounts to promote or to solicit support for political candidates or ballot initiatives.
 10. Secure a signed Photo Release form.
 11. Develop a content calendar.

APPROVED:



Robert R. Neall, Secretary, Dept. of Health

3/26/18
Effective Date

