

# MDH POLICY

<https://health.maryland.gov/Pages/mdhpolicies.aspx>

OPERATIONS—Office of Communications and  
Office of Enterprise Technology

MDH POLICY 01.04.03  
Effective Date: June 5, 2018

## DOMAIN AND URL NAMING CONVENTIONS

### I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To make certain Maryland Department of Health (MDH) URLs more user-friendly, it has become common practice to purchase shell external domain names that redirect to MDH web space. This practice (with some exceptions) undermines not only URL conventions and standards, but also MDH's brand integrity.

This policy establishes guidelines regarding the use of domain names by entities within MDH exposed to the Internet. This policy assures the assigned domain names are both unique worldwide and appropriately reflect the services and major programs for MDH.

Local health departments are exempt from this policy.

### II. BACKGROUND

All State government entity websites are required to utilize the "maryland.gov" standard domain naming convention and the standard third-level domain "agencyname.maryland.gov" which is determined and enforced by the Maryland Department of Information Technology (DoIT).

Web pages for programs within MDH must be part of the MDH main domain name pages (e.g., <https://health.maryland.gov/flu>).

To ensure consumer confidence, maximize user experience, and support MDH's brand, it is essential that web content either affiliated with or produced by MDH refers to the [health.maryland.gov](https://health.maryland.gov) main domain (with rare exceptions).

### III. POLICY STATEMENTS

#### A. DEFINITIONS.

In this policy, the following terms have the meanings indicated.

**Maryland Department of Health**

OFFICE OF REGULATION AND POLICY COORDINATION (ORPC)  
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1. **“Domain”** means a unique identifier for an Internet site or Internet Protocol (IP) network address, consisting of at least two segments separated by periods. Enterprises must register top-level domains with the Web Internet Registry and pay a yearly fee to maintain the registry.
2. **“Domain name”** means a series of characters that provides a label for a given Web location other than the actual IP address of that location. Each domain name provides a direct link to the address of a particular Web site. In practice, domain names are a series of characters with periods or dots (.) separating levels. Each domain name level must be between 1 and 63 characters long, inclusive. Levels with a domain name may contain only specific characters. Valid characters include letters (a-z), digits (1-9) and dashes or hyphens.
3. **“IP address”** means a unique number assigned by an Internet authority that identifies a computer on the Internet. The number consists of four groups of numbers between 0 and 255, separated by periods or dots (.). For example, 195.112.56.75 is an IP address.
4. **“Subdomain”** means a domain that is part of a larger domain under the Domain Name System (DNS) hierarchy. It is used as an easy way to create a more memorable Web address for specific or unique content within a website. Subdomains are also used by organizations that wish to assign a unique name to a particular department, function, or service related to the organization. For example, a university may assign “cs” to the computer science department’s web pages, which would look like cs.example.edu.
5. **“URL”** means uniform resource locator. A URL is the character string that identifies an Internet document’s exact name and location.
6. **“Web page”** means a document for the World Wide Web that is identified by a unique uniform resource locator (URL). A web page can be accessed and displayed on a monitor or mobile device through a Web browser.

## **B. DOMAIN AND SUBDOMAIN PROTOCOL**

### **1. CONVENTIONS.**

#### **a. General.**

- i. URLs must be easily understood and be recognizable by the citizens of Maryland;
- ii. URLs must clearly communicate the purpose of the site;
- iii. URLs must be easy to type and not contain confusing characters such as the numeral “0” (zero) in place of the letter “O” (“o”) or the numeral “1” (one) in place of the letter “L” (“l”); and

iv. URLs must contain lowercase letters, numbers, and dashes (-), but no special characters (e.g., underscores and/or blank spaces).

**b. MDH Subdomain.**

i. When URLs are generated after creation of a web page in SharePoint, the URL structure reflects both the path to and location of the content in SharePoint, under the MDH subdomain: *https://mmcp.health.maryland.gov/page/providerinformation.aspx*

ii. It is possible, however, to create a shorter URL that both accurately describes the content within the MDH subdomain and is more user-friendly: *https://health.maryland.gov/provider-info*

iii. Therefore, the standard naming convention within the MDH subdomain shall be as follows:

*https://health.maryland.gov/program-name*

iv. Organizational entities/programs/administrations are not permitted to insert identifiers between the “//” and “health.maryland.gov” to create a fourth-level domain, such as: *https://flu.health.maryland.gov*. When organizational entity/program/Administration identifiers are necessary, they will follow the standard naming convention to form an address.

i. Occasionally, for technical reasons, a site or server must be assigned a unique host name. In these cases, the naming convention shall be: *https://program-name.health.maryland.gov*

ii. When a site or server must be assigned a unique host name such as: *https://program-name.health.maryland.gov*, the public URL must use the standard naming convention of: *https://health.maryland.gov/program-name*; URL masking should be used so that the unique host name is not visible in the address bar.

**c. Restrictions.**

i. A dot-gov domain and the health.maryland.gov subdomain may not be used to advertise for private individuals, firms, or corporations and may not imply in any way the federal or state government endorses or favors any specific commercial product, commodity, or service.

ii. A dot-gov domain and the health.maryland.gov subdomain is for the sole operation of government, not for political purposes, political party purposes, or campaign purposes. No campaigning shall be conducted with dot-gov domains. No dot-gov website shall link, directly or indirectly, or refer to, websites created or operated by a campaign or any campaign entity or

politician or political entity. Political sites, political party names, or political party acronyms shall not be used.

d. **Existing, non-conforming URLs.**

i. URLs in existence prior to this policy that do not conform to this policy's domain and subdomain protocol are not required to change as the result of instituting this policy.

ii. Employees responsible for web content with affiliated non-conforming URLs are encouraged to work with both the Office of Communications and the Office of Enterprise Technology to create new URLs in compliance with this policy's domain and subdomain protocol, so that compliant URLs may be phased in over time (e.g., as publications are updated, etc.).

**2. EXEMPTIONS.**

a. Anyone requesting an exemption from the standard naming convention must submit a request for exemption to the MDH Office of Communications via email to [mdh.communications@maryland.gov](mailto:mdh.communications@maryland.gov).

b. In the case of external domain names, requests for an exemption must include a compelling justification in order to satisfy an extraordinary, non-conforming need for the exemption.

c. In the case of external domain names, web space associated with the exemption request remains subject to MDH standards and policies.

**3. PROCEDURES.**

a. **Shortened URL Request.**

i. MDH entities must submit a request for a shortened URL to the MDH Office of Communications via email to [mdh.communications@maryland.gov](mailto:mdh.communications@maryland.gov).

ii. The email must contain the original URL and a brief description of the content.

iii. The Office of Communications will coordinate with the Office of Enterprise Technology to shorten the URL and will notify the requesting entity when the request has been fulfilled.

b. **External Domain Name Request.**

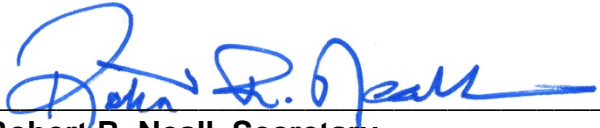
i. MDH entities must submit a request for an external domain name to the MDH Office of Communications via email to [mdh.communications@maryland.gov](mailto:mdh.communications@maryland.gov).

- ii. The email must include the domain name requested, the reason for the domain name, the IP address associated with the domain name, and the contact information for the domain name.
- iii. The Office of Communications will consider the request and approve or deny the request.
- iv. The Director of the Administrative Operations Division of the Office of Enterprise Technology and the Director of the Infrastructure and Network Division of the Office of Enterprise Technology are the Agency designees authorized to request external domain names and to make modifications to domain name services on behalf of the Department, pending domain name approval from the Office of Communications.
- v. Any requests other than those made by either the Director of the Administrative Operations Division of the Office of Enterprise Technology or the Director of the Infrastructure and Network Division of the Office of Enterprise Technology are not permitted.
- vi. The requestor seeking the exemption is responsible for any cost incurred in purchasing an external domain name.

#### **IV. REFERENCES**

- Gartner IT Glossary  
<https://www.gartner.com/it-glossary/domain-name>  
<https://www.gartner.com/it-glossary/ip-address-internet-protocol-address>  
<https://www.gartner.com/it-glossary/url-uniform-resource-locator>
- Techopedia  
<https://www.techopedia.com/definition/4774/web-page-page>  
<https://www.techopedia.com/definition/13370/subdomain>
- Guidelines for Maryland State Government Web Sites  
<http://doit.maryland.gov/webcom/Pages/Guidelines.aspx>
- Department of Health and Human Services Usability Guidelines  
<https://webstandards.hhs.gov/guidelines/>

**APPROVED:**

  
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**Robert R. Neall, Secretary**

**June 5, 2018**  
**Effective Date**