

News Release

December 24, 2009

## **Commissioner Cavoukian expects health sector to encrypt all health information on mobile devices: Nothing short of this is acceptable**

TORONTO – Ontario Information and Privacy Commissioner, Dr. Ann Cavoukian, today directed the province's health sector not remove from their premises any personal health information on mobile devices – unless this very sensitive information is encrypted, as required in a health order issued in 2007.

This follows the loss last week of a USB key containing the health information of almost 84,000 patients who attended H1N1 flu vaccination clinics in the Durham Region.

This incident is “very distressing,” said the Commissioner, “especially in light of the fact that I directed all Ontario health information custodians not to transport personal health information on laptops or other mobile computing devices unless the information was encrypted.” This direction was included in a 2007 order under the *Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA)*.

In addition to immediately launching an investigation into the incident, the Commissioner contacted Ontario's Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care as well as Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Arlene King, and is working with them to reinforce the importance of safeguarding health information. Dr. King is issuing a message to all Medical Officers of Health today urging them to cease storing or transferring health information that is not protected with strong encryption.

“Our health orders set a minimum standard for what we expect from all health information custodians, all of whom are required to protect personal health information under *PHIPA*,” said the Commissioner.

“I want to make this very clear,” the Commissioner said today. “No personal health information should be transported on mobile devices, unless the information is encrypted. This requirement is perfectly clear and encryption technology is readily available.”

In order not to disrupt any immunization clinics taking place over the holiday period, Commissioner Cavoukian advised that any unencrypted personal health information that needs to be transported, *must* be in the physical possession of the person responsible, at all times, until it reaches its secure location. This is only an interim measure until full encryption processes can be put into place.

“The analogy I would use is that of detectives transporting sensitive information in briefcases handcuffed to their wrist. The health information of Ontario citizens is equally sensitive, and requires this same level of protection,” said Commissioner Cavoukian.



The Commissioner's investigation report on the incident in Durham Region will be issued next month, in January 2010.

In March 2007, the Commissioner issued guidance to the Ontario health sector as part of a health order (HO-004) to Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children after a laptop computer containing the personal health information of 2,900 patients was stolen from a parked vehicle.

For more information on how to encrypt and secure health information on mobile devices, see the IPC fact sheet *Encrypting Personal Health Information on Mobile Devices* at [http://www.ipc.on.ca/images/Resources/up-4fact\\_12\\_e.pdf](http://www.ipc.on.ca/images/Resources/up-4fact_12_e.pdf).

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