

Code of Conduct

Consumer Guidance

About Emergency Medical Information and Identification Service Organizations

MedicAlert Foundation's Code of Conduct reflects the values and standards we live by worldwide. While intended as consumer guidance for those evaluating the purchase of a medical ID or emergency medical information service, it also serves as guidance for organizations that offer those products and services.

Across the globe, there are thousands of entities providing emergency medical information and identification services (medical ID). These offerings range from wallet cards and pre-engraved jewelry to personal push-button alarm services and personal health records (PHRs). MedicAlert Foundation is the only nonprofit medical ID services organization employing highly skilled medical response personnel to securely communicate your personal health information to first responders and hospitals in an emergency.

How do I know what to look for in an ID?

Choosing the right medical ID or emergency information service has become increasingly difficult with so many more options available. Some of the products and services in the marketplace are designed to promote the public's best interest, but many fall short. Furthermore, medical ID businesses are not subject to the same public or private oversight that other health or medical organizations are. The lack of definitive minimum standards ultimately puts you at risk of not being assisted as expected in the event of a medical emergency. In the absence of such standards, this Code of Conduct is designed to help you to decide which medical ID and which medical ID provider is best for you.

Please consider the following five-point checklist to ensure you are making an informed choice of medical ID and/or emergency information services. This checklist, coupled with the nature of your specific condition and needs, will provide an understanding of how to safely determine what level of service would be best suited for you.

The Code of Conduct is not intended to, and does not convey legal or medical advice. Users of the Code of Conduct should consult their own legal counsel or medical advisor.

MedicAlert Foundation International (www.medicalert.org)

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1. Protections for your personal health information

Organizations offering services to store your personal or medical information – often called a personal health record or PHR – should have policies and procedures in place to maintain the confidentiality and security of your confidential information. The policies should be clear and understandable and should include provisions for:

- A. Safeguarding the confidentiality of your personal and medical information as well as information technology practices and disaster recovery systems that meet or exceed applicable laws and regulations.
- B. Informed consent so that you know exactly how and under what circumstances your confidential information will be disclosed.
- C. Equally strong protection of your emergency contact and financial information.
- D. An ongoing compliance function to ensure that the organization’s privacy and confidentiality policies are enforced and up-to-date. This compliance function should be adequately funded, staffed, trained, and given direct and open access to the organization’s leadership.
- E. The right to maintain privacy on a medical ID by providing alternatives for engraving certain conditions or even limiting engraving to directions of who to call in an emergency.
- F. Written notification to you in the event of an unauthorized release or disclosure of your confidential information.
- G. Protecting privacy and security of your personal information at every stage of development of products and services.
- H. Providing you reasonable access to your stored personal data
- I. A records audit process that tracks or provides an “audit trail” of all disclosures of personal health information.

2. High standards for engraving medical ID products

All organizations offering engraved medical ID jewelry or devices should ensure these products can be appropriately understood and identified in the event of a medical emergency. Medical ID companies should have:

- A. Engraving which is legible and of high quality
- B. Engraving standards that delineate the hierarchy or priority of medical information included and adheres to medical terminology standards.
- C. Medical terminology standards for engraving that require the use of terms and abbreviations accepted by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Health Care Organizations, the National Library of Medicine or similar national standard setting organization in your country. .
- D. Medication standards covering use of generic and/or brand name medications.

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3. Safe and effective medical ID jewelry and products

All organizations offering jewelry or similar ID products (e.g., bracelets, dog tags, shoe tags, etc.) should have policies to ensure the safety and functionality of the product, including:

- A. A commitment to follow national product safety guidelines such as those promulgated by U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission or similar standard setting bodies in other countries.
- B. A commitment to ensure ongoing product testing for lead or other toxic materials comply with all consumer protection requirements
- C. A commitment to sell products that are safe for children and other vulnerable populations (e.g. does not pose a choking hazard for children).
- D. A commitment to sell or provide only medical ID product designs and emblems easily recognized by first responders and others in the medical field.
- E. A commitment to institute active, nationwide programs to inform first responders and other emergency medical personnel so that their products and services will be universally recognized by first responders in the field during an emergency.

4. No-fail emergency response services

All organizations offering emergency response services that communicate with first responders or hospital emergency departments about your vital medical information, including emergency contacts and family notification services, should have policies and procedures designed to ensure:

- A. The emergency services are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and if live call center services are being provided, the emergency response service center is adequately staffed with trained operators. In addition, if an automated computerized response system is being provided, be sure to understand the nature and extent of the information about you that will be communicated and that there is sufficient capacity and functionality to handle multiple inquiries simultaneously from emergency responders.
- B. Personal health information will be provided only to authorized first responders and medical personnel at a time of need and that a process exists to identify/verify that the first responder or hospital accessing the emergency record is authorized.
- C. A record or an audit trail is maintained of when your information disclosed to first responders or other authorized persons; who has accessed what information, when and for what purpose.
- D. Health records provided are “date stamped” for last date of validation or review to enable emergency responders to assess the integrity and currency of the information.

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- E. At least one channel, but preferably multiple channels, for communication with emergency responders is available (i.e., telephone, secure fax, and/or secure web access etc.).
- F. Consumers are informed prior to purchase whether emergency response services are rendered by a “live” call center or an automated electronic system.
- G. Family notification services (if offered) are performed on a timely basis with established protocols on the nature of information that is communicated and the method used to communicate that information to designated contacts.
- H. The availability of language translation services to address languages not common to country of origin.

5. Better standards of business

In addition to the usual standard better business practices, all organizations should have policies and procedures designed to:

- A. Ensure consumers, their families, and emergency callers are treated with dignity and respect.
- B. Provide emergency information to authorized emergency responders regardless of consumer’s payment status for the service at the time of an emergency.
- C. Address consumer complaints with a clearly established and articulated complaint process
- D. Ensure consumer has the right to terminate services for any reason.

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