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Guidance Note

香港個人資料私隱專員公署
Office of the Privacy Commissioner
for Personal Data, Hong Kong

Protecting Personal Data under Work-from-Home Arrangements: Guidance on the Use of Video Conferencing Software

Introduction

1. Work-from-home (WFH) arrangements have been made from time to time during COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, video conferencing has fast become the new normal. The increasingly prevalent use of video conferencing software creates new risks to data security and personal data privacy[1].

2. This Guidance serves to provide practical advice to organisations and their employees to enhance data security and the protection of personal data privacy when they use video conferencing software. This Guidance is also applicable to other users of video conferencing software, such as teachers and students.

Practical guidance on the use of video conferencing software

3. Organisations (including business entities) should review and assess the policies and measures on security and protection of personal data privacy of different video conferencing software in order to choose the ones that meet their requirements. For example, organisations may wish to use a video conferencing software with end-to-end encryption if they cannot avoid using the software for discussing confidential matters.

4. Users of video conferencing software should pay heed to the following general security measures-

   (1) safeguard their user accounts by setting up strong passwords, changing the passwords regularly, and activating multi-factor authentication, if available;

   (2) ensure that the video conferencing software is up-to-date and the latest security patches have been installed; and

   (3) use reliable and secure internet connection for conducting video conferencing.

5. To ensure the security and protection of personal data privacy during a video conference, the host of the conference should-

   (1) set up a unique meeting ID as well as a strong and unique password for the conference; provide the meeting ID and the passwords to the intended participants only, and through different means (such as email and instant messaging), whenever possible;

   (2) where possible, arrange one more "host" (in addition to the main host who is chairing the meeting) to deal with administrative, technical and other contingent issues during the video conference;

[1] Data Protection Principle 4 in Schedule 1 to the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (Cap. 486 of the Laws of Hong Kong) requires data users to take all practicable steps to protect the personal data they hold against unauthorised or accidental access, processing, erasure, loss or use.

(3) set up a virtual waiting room and validate participants' identities before allowing them to join the conference; "lock" the meeting when all participants have been admitted to prevent unauthorised access;

(4) only allow those participants who need to make presentations to share their screens or documents;

(5) inform all participants and obtain their consents before recording the conference; prohibit participants from recording the conference; and

(6) store the records of the conference (such as video recording and chat messages) securely, such as by using password protection or encryption and delete the records when they are no longer necessary.

6. For participants of a video conference, to protect their personal data privacy, they should-

(1) be aware of their backgrounds, which may be captured by their cameras and may reveal their personal or sensitive information to other participants; use virtual backgrounds if necessary;

(2) turn off the microphones (or even the cameras) when they are not speaking;

(3) avoid discussing personal or sensitive information during the video conference as far as practicable; and

(4) close unnecessary documents and windows (such as windows showing email accounts) before the sharing of screen to avoid disclosing sensitive information to other participants.

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PCPD website

Enquiry Hotline : **(852) 2827 2827**
Fax : **(852) 2877 7026**
Address : **Room 1303, 13/F, Sunlight Tower, 248 Queen's Road East, Wanchai, Hong Kong**
Email : **communications@pcpd.org.hk**

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