

Pennsylvania Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (POLST)

Information for Patients and Families

What is the POLST form?

The POLST (Pennsylvania Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment) form is a brightly colored, medical order form. Your Physician/PA/CRNP may use the POLST to write orders that indicate what types of life-sustaining treatment you do or do not want if you become seriously ill.

Who should have a POLST form?

If you have a serious health condition, you need to make decisions about life-sustaining treatment. Your physician, physician assistant or certified registered nurse practitioner (Physician/PA/CRNP) can use the POLST form to represent your wishes as clear, specific written medical orders. The POLST form is used when you can't speak for yourself.

Does law require it?

The POLST form is voluntary and is intended to:

- help you and your Physician/PA/CRNP discuss and develop plans to reflect your wishes;
- assist Physicians/PAs/CRNPs, health care facilities and emergency personnel to honor your wishes for life-sustaining treatment.

Who completes and signs the POLST form?

A Physician/PA/CRNP must sign this form in order for it to be followed by other health care professionals. Other health professionals who work with your Physician/PA/CRNP may complete the form.

I have an advance directive, do I need a POLST form too?

Even if you have an advance directive, the POLST form is recommended.

Additionally, you may obtain more information about advance directives from your Physician/PA/CRNP or from www.caringinfo.org.

.What if my loved one can no longer communicate her/his wishes for care?

Health care agents or representatives may be able to speak on behalf of a loved one. A Physician/PA/CRNP can complete the POLST form based on health care agents or representatives understanding of their loved one's wishes.

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Where is the POLST form used?

The POLST remains with you if you are moved between care settings, regardless of whether you are in the hospital, at home, or in a long-term care facility. If you live at home, keep the original pink POLST on the refrigerator where emergency responders can find it. If you live at a long-term care facility, POLST will be kept in your chart.

What are some of the medical terms used when talking about serious illness?

- **Advance directives:** Advance directives are written instructions stating how you wish your medical decisions be made if you become unable to make decisions for yourself. Some advance directives are sometimes called living wills. Most states allow patients to appoint a person who can make health care decisions on their behalf when patients cannot speak for themselves.
- **Antibiotics:** Antibiotics treat some infections (such as pneumonia) that can develop when a person is seriously ill.
- **Artificial hydration:** When a person can no longer eat or drink by mouth, fluids can be given to them by tube.
- **Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR):** Attempts to restart breathing and the heartbeat of a person who has no heartbeat or has stopped breathing. Typically involves “mouth-to-mouth” and forceful pressure on the chest to restart the heart. May also involve electric shock (defibrillation) or a plastic tube down the throat into the windpipe to assist breathing (intubation).
- **Comfort measures:** Care undertaken with the primary goal of keeping a person comfortable (rather than prolonging life). On the POLST, a person who requests “comfort measures only” would be transferred to the hospital only if needed for his or her comfort.
- **Intravenous (IV) fluids:** A small plastic tube (catheter) is inserted directly into the vein and fluids are administered through the tube. Typically, IV fluids are given on a short-term basis.
- **Mechanical ventilation/respiration:** A plastic tube is put down the throat to help breathing. A machine pumps air in and out of the lungs through the tube when a person is no longer able to breathe on their own.
- **Tube feeding:** On a short-term basis, fluids and liquid nutrients can be given through a tube in the nose that goes into the stomach (nasogastric or “NG” tube). For long-term feeding, a tube can be inserted through a surgical procedure directly into the stomach (gastric or “G” tube) or the intestines (jejunal or “J” tube).
- **Health Care Decision Maker:** If you have completed a durable health care power of attorney, the person you have designated will be able to make decisions for you if you are unable to speak for yourself. If you have not designated a durable health care power of attorney, state law allows a

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family member or another person to serve as your health care representative and make decisions for you.

How can I get more information about POLST?

Ask your doctor, physician assistant, certified registered nurse practitioner or other health care professional or go to the following web site and click on Pennsylvania. **www.polst.org**