

Patient and Family Caregiver Frequently Asked Questions

Who should have a POST form?

The POST form is for **seriously ill** people with:

- A terminal condition,
- advanced chronic progressive illness or frailty, or
- a condition that CPR probably would not help.

The POST form is **NOT** for people with:

- *early stages* of a progressive illness;
- a disability who still have many years of life expectancy; or
- good health.

Do I *have to* have a POST form?

No. You do not *have to* have a POST form. But if you are seriously ill, it is a good idea. The POST form lets your health care team know your wishes about what kinds of medical treatment you want (and don't want) at the end of your life.

Is a POST form the same as an *Advance Directive*?

No, it is not the same. *All* adults are advised to have an **advance directive**. An advance directive is a form you fill out to say what kinds of treatments you do and do not want in the future. It is also a place where you can also name a **health care representative**. This person is legally appointed to speak for you when you cannot speak for yourself.

A POST form is only for people who are near the end of life. The Indiana **POST** is recommended for patients who are seriously ill and may die within a year. Because the POST form lists medical orders, it is the best form to use to get the kind of treatment you want.

Should I fill out an advance directive *AND* a POST form?

Maybe. If you have an advanced chronic progressive illness, advanced frailty, or terminal conditions, it is a good idea to complete both an advance directive and POST. That makes it more likely to have your end-of-life treatment preferences known and followed.

It also helps if you discuss your preferences for end-of-life treatment with your health care representative.

Does a health care professional need to sign my POST form? Yes. The POST form is a medical order. A licensed doctor, advanced practice registered nurse (also known as a nurse practitioner), or physician assistant **MUST** read and sign it.

What should I do if my health care provider does not want to sign my POST form?

Health care providers who do not know you very well or are not familiar with the POST form may not want to sign your POST form.

You have other options you can explore.

You or your health care representative should:

- Ask another treating doctor, advanced practice registered nurse, or physician assistant to sign your POST form;
- Transfer to a different health care provider who is willing to sign your POST form; or
- Have another health care professional talk with your provider about the legal protections POST provides.

Can a health care professional fill out a POST form with me?

Yes. Your health care provider can have someone help you or your health care representative or proxy fill out the POST form. This person can be a:

- social worker,
- nurse,
- chaplain, or
- other health care professional.

This person should also sign on the back of the POST form, where indicated.

A doctor, advanced practice registered nurse or physician assistant **MUST** still read and sign the form to make sure the orders are reasonable and medically appropriate.

Can a POST form be filled out or canceled without telling me or my representative/proxy?

No. The purpose of the POST form is to make sure *your* end-of-life wishes are followed. It should not be filled out, changed, or canceled without your or your health care representative's participation.

How often should my POST form be reviewed?

You (or your health care representative or proxy) and your health care team should review your POST whenever:

- You transfer from one health care facility to another, or
- Your medical condition changes.

Can I change my mind about the decisions I made on my POST form?

Yes. You can void the current POST and create a new one at any time.

Your health care representative can also void your POST if she or he believes you would have changed your mind. Similarly, your proxy can cancel POST if there is no legally appointed representative available and he or she believes you would have changed your mind.

To cancel your POST, you or your representative have these options:

- destroy the old POST form; or
- tell your health care team you want to cancel the current POST.

When does my new POST take effect?

Your POST changes take effect as soon as you or your representative/proxy tells your health care provider about the changes and obtains the signature of a doctor, advanced practice registered nurse, or physician assistant.

Can my health care representative or proxy make changes to my POST?

Yes. Your health care representative can change your POST if you are unable to speak for yourself. But your representative must only do this if she or he knows or believes the changes are what you would have wanted. If your wishes are not known, the representative should work with the health care team to figure out what is in your best interest. This means they will make a decision about what will be most likely to give you a good quality of life. Your proxy has the same authority if there is no legally appointed healthcare representative.

Should my POST affect health care decisions about day-to-day treatment?

Yes. For example, POST forms can guide decisions about:

- medications
- hospitalization
- feeding tubes,
- antibiotics to treat pneumonia, and
- other treatments.

The POST form is not only about CPR.

Do health care providers *have to follow my wishes on the POST form?*

Yes. Health care providers **MUST** follow the most current POST that is available to them.

Exceptions: Health care providers do **NOT** have to follow a POST if they believe:

- the POST form is not legally valid;
- you or your health care representative or proxy canceled the POST;
- you or your health care representative or proxy asked for an alternative treatment;
- it would not be medically appropriate to comply with the request on your POST form; or
- they have a religious or moral conflict with your POST orders. If this happens, they **MUST** transfer you to another health care provider who can carry out the POST orders.

Where should I keep my original POST form?

The POST form is an important legal document. The original, signed copy belongs to you.

Where to keep your POST:

If you live at home...

Keep your POST form with your medications or on the refrigerator. Make sure family members and caregivers know where it is.

If you live in a health care facility...

Your POST should be the first page in your medical record, unless your facility has a different procedure.

If you are in a nursing home... Your nursing home may keep your original POST if you transfer to a hospital. If so, they should send a copy of your POST with you.

Can someone with significant physical and/or developmental disabilities use a POST?

Maybe. The POST form is for someone near the end of life.

A person with disabilities **should** have a POST if they also have one or more of these conditions:

- advanced chronic progressive illness or frailty,
- a terminal condition, or
- a condition that CPR probably would not help.

If the person with disabilities is medically stable, they **should NOT** have a POST.

What are examples of when someone with a severe disability *should* have a POST form?

A person with a disability should have a POST if they:

- have a terminal disease,
- show a significant decline in health (like frequent aspiration pneumonia),
- are in hospice or a palliative care program, or
- have a worsening health condition that severely affects their functioning, and that intervention will not change.

Who can complete a POST?

You can complete a POST with your health care provider.

A legal guardian or health care representative may complete a POST for someone who does not have the capacity to make decisions on their own.

A proxy based on the Indiana proxy hierarchy/rank order list can complete a POST for someone who does not have capacity if there is no health care representative.

Note: Do not assume that someone with a disability cannot make decisions.

Is a photocopy of a POST also valid?

Yes. Photocopies, faxes, and black and white originals are legally valid.

Why is the POST usually on bright pink paper?

Pink paper makes the form easy to see and quickly found in an emergency. This is also part of the national guidelines. The POST does not *have to* be on pink paper, but organizations are encouraged to print it on bright pink paper.

Are POST forms from other states valid in Indiana?

Yes. Forms that are very similar to Indiana's POST form are valid in Indiana, and may be honored.

The form **MUST** be:

- the other state's *official* form (visit www.polst.org),
- signed by a doctor, nurse, or physician assistant,
- signed by the patient or the patient's health care representative or proxy, and
- in English.

Is Indiana's POST form valid in other states?

It depends on the state. Many states prefer to use their own form. It is best to get a form from a health care provider in the state where you may want care.

For more information, visit www.polst.org, and check with the other state's program.

Does the POST form have to be in English?

Yes, the Indiana POST form must be in English. This helps ensure that emergency medical responders and health care providers know what it says. There are translations of the POST form into several other languages at www.indianapost.org.