
Expanded Work from Home Policies May Pose Increased Security Risks

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Geographic Regions
Worldwide

Suggested Distribution
Clinical/Biomedical Engineering, Risk Management/Continuous Quality Improvement, Information Technology

Problem
The increased amount of employees working from home during the COVID-19 health emergency poses security risks.

This alert is a living document and may be updated

Recommendations

— Evaluate the remote access and VPN configuration for increased volume and new use cases.
  • Split-tunnel configurations may increase risk by allowing traffic to bypass perimeter security controls (e.g., firewalls, web filters, data loss prevention [DLP]).
  • Refer to ECRI's 2018 Top 10 Hazard regarding remote access, Hazard H0471.
  • Follow best practices when possible (see the NIST solutions here).
  • Exercise caution while applying changes to configurations.

— Ensure that Endpoint protection or antimalware systems are remotely updatable and configurable.

— Evaluate remote access and VPN usage policies and modify for the current COVID-19 health emergency.

— Educate employees on the following:
  • Proper use of work from home resources including remote access systems or VPNs.
  • HIPAA policies and handling of PHI.
  • Phishing awareness (see Hazard H0570).

Background

— Healthcare providers are enforcing work from home policies during the COVID-19 health emergency. This poses increased security risks.
Employees inexperienced with working from home may need to be educated on practices including:

- Acceptable use of work devices at home.
- The handling of PHI at home.

Remote access systems, VPNs, and security controls may not be configured to:

- Handle increased load.
- Support workflow from new types users who are now teleworking.
- Allow essential system updates from remote devices.

To accommodate increased traffic on VPNs, some facilities may choose to allow some traffic to bypass perimeter controls (split-tunneling). While this may be necessary, it inherently increases risk.

**References**

1. ECRI. Hackers can exploit remote access to systems, disrupting healthcare operations [top 10 hazards list online]. 2018 Nov 1 [cited 2020 Mar 20]. Available from Internet: [Click here](#).


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