

Who Needs a POLST, a Portable Medical Order?

POLST is a voluntary process that lets people who are seriously ill or have advanced frailty¹ choose certain health care treatments when they cannot speak for themselves.

Conversations between the individual and their health care provider may result in a portable medical order form called a POLST form. There are multiple names for POLST (MOLST, MOST, POST, etc.) so your state may call it something else (see <https://polst.org/state-programs/>).

How do I know if POLST is right for me?

POLST was created to help people with serious illness or advanced frailty¹ have a way to share their treatment preferences with emergency personnel. These are people whose medical conditions mean they are likely to have a medical emergency: and they likely know what that emergency will be. This includes people who:

- Are at risk for a medical emergency based on their current medical condition;
- Have had multiple unplanned hospital visits in the last year;
- Have been diagnosed with serious illness such as severe heart disease, metastatic cancer, advanced lung, renal or liver disease; advanced dementia, and other conditions; or
- Recognizes their advancing condition is significantly limiting their ability to perform activities of daily living.

If you think POLST is right for you, talk with your provider about:

- Your current medical condition;
- What happens if you are resuscitated: how long you will likely be in the hospital, your odds of recovery, what that means for your disease progression; and
- What treatment options are available to you and what the benefits and burdens are for you specifically.

A POLST medical order may not work for everyone. Sometimes treatment preferences are too complicated to put in a single medical order.

Why is POLST not for healthy people?

Healthy people do not need a POLST form to have all medical treatment options available to them during a medical emergency. Having all treatment options available is the current standard of care, or what will be provided normally, by emergency personnel such as EMS, first responders and emergency department providers.

People who do not live with serious illness or advanced frailty will likely not need a POLST medical order, except in unusual circumstances. You can talk with your provider about care goals and treatments and complete other care planning documents.

Talk with your health care provider about the POLST process to see if a POLST medical order is right for you. Read more about the POLST form: Patient's Guide to a POLST (<https://polst.org/form-guide-patients-pdf>)

¹ indicating a combination of advanced chronic disease and/or advanced age with functional decline with or without significant weight loss