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U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

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External Link Icon & Disclaimer

Document Type: Standard

Content:

HHS Web sites **must** indicate to users when a link will take them to a Web site that is not sponsored, hosted or managed by one or more federal government entities by using a standard external link icon (see Requirements below).

HHS must disclaim these links with the standard disclaimer. This applies to links to extranets which include non-federal participants.

This applies to links incorporated in:

- Public-facing (external) Web sites
- Intranet sites
- Extranets
- Portals
- Blogs and other social media

HHS **may** use the external link icon and disclaimer when linking to other federal government sites. This may be desirable so Agencies can use CSS to automatically detect external links and provide a consistent presentation of these links, while reducing the burden and workload on Web content managers to manually add the icons.

An example of a disclaimer policy is available at: http://www.hhs.gov/disclaimer.html.

Reason:

Users tend to assume that links will take them to another page within the same Web site. When this assumption is not true, users may be misled, or become confused.

Designers should differentiate between simply moving down a page, e.g., "Topics on this Page" label, and leaving the site altogether.

Users trust content provided by the Federal government. Linking to non-Federal sites with no without indicating users will be leaving the site altogether or a providing a

disclaimer, could lead users to believe the referred site, or its sponsor, is either owned or endorsed by the Federal government.

Requirements:

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All HHS Web sites shall use an icon placed to the right of an external link to designate links to all non-Federal Web sites, including .net, .edu, .org, and .com sites, as well as to

state, local and other non-federal .gov Web sites and any extranet which includes non-federal participants.

The approved icon for indicating links to non-Federal sites is which is available in the WCD Image and Icon Library at http://www.hhs.gov/web/services-and-resources/icon-and-widget-library/index.html.

Sources:

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- Nall, Koyani and Lafond, 2001; Nielsen and Tahir, 2002; Spool, et al., 1997.

Related Web Standards and Usability Guidelines:

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- Usability Guideline: Indicate Internal vs. External Links