

# A Chicago children's hospital has taken its networks offline after a cyberattack

February 5 2024, by Kathleen Foody

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Lurie Children's Hospital sign is seen at the hospital as patients walk in, Monday, Feb. 5, 2024, in Skokie, Ill. A Chicago children's hospital has been forced to take its networks offline after an unspecified digital attack, limiting access to medical records and hampering communication by phone or email since the middle of last week. Credit: AP Photo/Nam Y. Huh

A Chicago children's hospital has been forced to take its networks offline after an unspecified cyberattack, limiting access to medical records and hampering communication by phone or email since the middle of last week.

The situation at Lurie Children's Hospital had all the hallmarks of a ransomware attack, although hospital officials would not confirm or deny the cause Monday.

The hospital initially described the issue Wednesday as a network outage. On Thursday, officials released public statements saying the hospital had taken its networks offline as part of its response to a "cybersecurity matter."

"We are taking this very seriously, investigating with the support of leading experts, and are working in collaboration with law enforcement agencies," the hospital said in a statement Thursday. "As Illinois' leading provider for pediatric care, our overarching priority is to continue providing safe, quality care to our patients and the communities we serve. Lurie Children's is open and providing care to patients with as limited disruption as possible."

Media representatives for the hospital did not return messages from The Associated Press on Monday seeking more information, including whether the attack was caused by ransomware. Such extortion-style attacks are popular among those seeking financial gain by locking data, records or other critical information, and then demanding money to release it back to the owner.

A 2023 report by the Department of Health and Human Services warned of dramatic increases in digital attacks on health care and public health entities in recent years, causing delayed or disrupted care for patients across the country.

Health care providers aren't alone; state courts, county or state governments and schools all have struggled to recover from cyber-based attacks.

Christina Snyder's 9-year-old daughter receives regular infusions of medication at Lurie Children's for a rare autoimmune disease that weakens her bones. Her appointment Friday went smoothly, taking just about 30 minutes longer than usual, Snyder said, adding that she was comforted by the nurses' approach.

They kept records on paper and texted her daughter's doctor to verify the dose of medication needed, she said.

"I would say they're doing an amazing job in a stressful situation," Snyder said. "They did everything they could do to keep us on schedule and make us feel comfortable."

Jason Castillo, though, said he thinks the hospital has failed to inform families of patients whose surgeries were delayed. Castillo said his nearly 7-month-old daughter was supposed to have had surgery on her heart Wednesday morning, a procedure doctors have planned for since her birth.

But it was quickly clear something had happened at the hospital. After a delay of a few hours, the girl's surgeon said he wasn't comfortable going forward as the hospital tried to respond to the cyberattack, Castillo said.

"We've already been kind of in limbo with our lives waiting for the surgery, knowing we'd need to drop everything and care for her until she's healthy again," Castillo said. "We just have no idea when it is going to be rescheduled, if we'd need to switch hospitals. And we really don't want to do that."

The latest annual report for Lurie Children's said staff treated around 260,000 patients last year. Chicago-area pediatrician practices that work with the hospital also have reported being unable to access digital medical records because of the attack.

On Friday, the hospital announced a separate call center for patients to get prescriptions refilled or ask non-urgent questions about care or appointments.

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