

July 15, 2022

CONSUMER ALERT

ATTORNEY GENERAL RAOUL URGES INDIVIDUALS TO PROTECT THEIR DIGITAL PRIVACY WHEN SEEKING REPRODUCTIVE CARE OR INFORMATION

Chicago — Attorney General Kwame Raoul is releasing guidance to help individuals seeking reproductive care protect their privacy while using apps and online platforms. Raoul urges people to exercise caution when utilizing web-based apps and websites that might track users' search and location information, which could be shared with third parties.

In particular, people should be aware that information such as location and search histories are often collected by apps and service providers. In addition, fertility and menstrual tracking apps require users to provide personal information related to reproductive health. Such information might be disclosed or sold to third parties, and Attorney General Raoul is encouraging people to utilize [new information available free](#) on the Attorney General's website to help them protect their personal data.

"In anticipation of the Supreme Court overturning Roe v. Wade, several states – including those that share borders with Illinois – enacted draconian policies to immediately limit or criminalize abortion. As a result, millions of Americans are now faced with searching for alternative methods of managing their reproductive health or seeking abortion services. It is critical that before using apps, web platforms or search engines, people be aware that their personal data could be shared with third parties or used to identify their location," Raoul said. "Women have a right to use web-based tools to seek reproductive health care without worrying that their data or location is being shared with third parties. I strongly encourage people to review my office's free guidance to limit the personal data that can be collected and shared with others."

Attorney General Raoul is urging people seeking reproductive care to be aware of the potential for their sensitive personal information to be collected and even shared with third parties. Raoul recommends that anyone using apps or websites to search for reproductive health care services or information consider taking the following steps to limit the personal information that is collected and potentially shared with third parties:

- **Turn off your cell phone's location services, particularly when visiting a location that you want to remain private.** Apps can share location information with other entities such as data brokers, and turning off location services prevents your phone from transmitting your location. Generally, location services and tracking can be turned off by changing your phone's privacy settings.
- **Turn off your phone's ad personalization feature.** Companies can determine which ads to display on your phone by accessing your search history, location, sites visited, apps utilized and other data. Apple users can turn off ad personalization by going into the phone's privacy settings. Android phone users should go into the phone settings and opting to reset the advertising ID.
- **Adjust your online privacy settings.** Limit additional forms of location tracking, such as those used by search engines and mapping apps, by changing privacy settings within your account settings. Prior to installing a new app and granting access to your information, be aware of the permissions the app is requesting.
- **Do not share sensitive personal information on social media.** Be aware that information posted on social media could be publicly-available if you do not limit sharing.
- **Do not post on social media while visiting reproductive care facilities if you want to ensure the visit remains private.** Even if your device's location tracking is turned off, social

media postings and tags associated with nearby businesses could be combined with your search history to reveal personal information.

- **Use encrypted messaging instead of unprotected SMS text messages.** Encrypted messages allow only the intended recipient to read the message and prevent the contents from being intercepted by any third parties.
- **Protect your online history by using a private web browser, your device's "Do Not Track" option or a virtual private network (VPN).** If researching reproductive care, use a private web browser that does not save your search history and blocks web trackers. Otherwise, use your browser in private mode so it does not collect and store your online searches. Always enable your device's "Do Not Track" option, which asks that websites not use tracking cookies. Be aware, however, those requests do not have to be granted. Using a VPN prevents third parties from tracking your IP address because the VPN allows you to browse using an IP address that differs from your actual IP address.

Attorney General Kwame Raoul's Consumer Protection Division protects Illinois consumers and businesses victimized by fraud, deception and unfair business practices. Individuals who have concerns about privacy while seeking reproductive care are encouraged to [visit the Attorney General's website](#) or call the Attorney General's Consumer Fraud hotlines:

1-800-386-5438 (Chicago)
1-800-243-0618 (Springfield)
1-800-243-0607 (Carbondale)



PROTECT YOUR DIGITAL PRIVACY WHEN SEEKING REPRODUCTIVE CARE

Follow these tips to help reduce your digital footprint and prevent the disclosure of sensitive personal information to third parties.

Information from various sources could be combined to create a very detailed picture of the locations you visit in person, online searches you perform, and numerous other pieces of sensitive personal information that you may not wish to be disclosed.

Anytime you use an app that is on your phone or install a new app you should be aware of what permissions the app is requesting and decide whether to grant the app access to your information.

You can take the following steps to protect your sensitive personal information from disclosure to any third parties who do not need this information or may even seek to use this information against you.

Please keep in mind that this is not an exhaustive list of entities that may have sensitive data about your activities and locations. For example, your financial institutions and ride share companies also may have sensitive data about you.

Tips to protect your digital privacy while seeking reproductive care:



Turn off location services on your wireless phone - Avoid, when asked, giving any app permission to access your device's location data. Many of the apps that resell data to data brokers don't really need your location information.

To visit a place without revealing your location you should turn off location services on your phone to prevent your phone from transmitting your location.

Apple iPhones: go to Settings/Privacy/Location Services/Tracking

Android phones: go to Settings/Location



Turn off ad personalization on your phone - Some companies access your search history, sites visited, apps used, location, and other data and then use that information to determine which ads to display on your phone. To turn off ad personalization:

Apple iPhones: go to Settings/Privacy/Apple Advertising

Android phones: go to Settings/Google services/Ads/Reset advertising ID to disable personalized ads



Adjust your online privacy settings - In addition to your phone tracking your location, be aware that search engines and map providers that you use may track your location. You can limit this additional form of location tracking by changing privacy settings within your accounts with those services.

For more specifics and instructions for Apple iPhone and Android phones, go to www.support.google.com and search "Managing Location History."



Research any period tracking apps or fertility tracker apps you are using - These apps may sell or share the very sensitive information you provide. Carefully read the app's privacy policy and FAQ. If in doubt, consider deleting the app and asking them to destroy the data in your account.



Do not share sensitive personal information on social media - Be aware that information you post on your social media pages could be publicly available if you do not limit sharing, or if one of your social media friends discloses the information.

Consider refraining from posting anything on social media while visiting a reproductive care center - Even if your location tracking is turned off, social media postings and tags associated with businesses near reproductive care facilities could be combined with your search history to create a profile that might unintentionally share more information than desired.



Use encrypted messaging instead of unprotected SMS text messages - Encrypted messages are designed to allow only the intended recipient to read the message and prevent the contents of the message from being intercepted by any third parties.



Protect your online search history. First log out of open accounts, use a private web browser and the Do Not Track option, or set up a VPN -

- Make sure to log out of social media accounts, email, and tech platforms before conducting your search for reproductive services.
- If you are researching reproductive care on your phone, computer, or other device, consider using a private web browser that does not save your search history and blocks web trackers.
- Use the Private Mode setting in your browser. Private Mode means that the browser will not collect and store your online searches.

Google Chrome/Incognito
Mozilla Firefox/Private Browsing

Microsoft Edge/In Private
Safari/Private Window

- Always select the Do Not Track option under your browser privacy settings on your phone, computer or other device. The Do Not Track option requests that any website you visit does not use their tracking cookies. However, these requests do not have to be honored.
- Consider using a Virtual Private Network or VPN to access the internet from your phone, computer, or other device. It provides an IP address (the digital identification label for your device) that is different from your actual IP address. That means that if a third party is trying to track your location, they will not be able to determine your location based on the IP address associated with your browsing session.
- To use a VPN you have to first download a VPN (paid or free) program or app on your selected device. You will then need to activate the VPN before taking any actions you wish to remain private and anonymous.

If you have questions or concerns about your privacy while seeking reproductive care, please contact our office by completing a consumer complaint form online at www.IllinoisAttorneyGeneral.gov or by calling 1-800-386-5438 (Chicago) • 1-800-243-0618 (Springfield) • 1-800-243-0607 (Carbondale).

