# Public health bodies urged to create secure alternatives to commercial period tracker apps



Public health bodies are being urged to develop alternatives to commercial period tracker apps amid growing concerns over the security of women’s personal data. According to a report from the University of Cambridge, these smartphone applications, which track menstrual cycles, are increasingly recognised not merely as tools for personal health but as a “goldmine” for data analytics. The report highlights that they gather extensive information, including details about exercise, diet, hormone levels, and even sexual preferences, leading to significant privacy concerns.

As the report suggests, the financial value of the data collected by these apps is often vastly underestimated by users. This oversight is particularly alarming in a market characterised by minimal regulation. Inappropriately accessed data could expose users to various risks, including workplace discrimination and cyberstalking, as well as complicating access to reproductive health services such as abortion.

Dr Stefanie Felsberger, the lead author of the study, emphasised the discrepancy between the empowering rhetoric surrounding menstrual cycle tracking apps and the profit-driven models that underpin their existence. “Menstrual cycle tracking apps are presented as empowering women and addressing the gender health gap,” she explained. “Yet the business model rests on commercial use, selling user data and insights to third parties for profit. There are real and frightening risks associated with the commodification of this information.”

The degree of commercial interest in this data cannot be overstated; with estimates suggesting period tracking data can be over 200 times more valuable than basic demographic information for targeted advertising. This is pivotal to understanding why public health bodies such as the NHS should step in to provide an alternative framework that prioritises user privacy. Dr Felsberger pointed out that existing services like Planned Parenthood in the U.S. have already implemented similar solutions, leaving the UK in need of its own secure and transparent options.

The call for public health initiatives comes against a background of increased scrutiny on the data practices of such applications. A survey conducted by the UK’s Information Commissioner's Office found that half of the women using these apps expressed anxiety over how their data may be utilised. The ICO is currently reviewing period and fertility tracking applications for security risks, aiming to identify harmful practices such as unclear privacy policies and excessive data collection.

Despite growing awareness about the potential misuse of period-tracking data, particularly within the context of restrictive abortion laws, federal protections remain inadequate. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) does not extend to most of these apps, leaving users vulnerable to data exploitation. Privacy experts have voiced concerns that in regions with tougher regulations on reproductive health, data from these apps could potentially be weaponised against individuals.

Amidst these revelations, some established apps are attempting to address user concerns. Apps like Cycles and Clue have taken steps to enhance privacy assurances regarding sensitive information, notably pregnancies and abortions. However, reliance on user-agreed privacy policies alone may not suffice; regulations need to be strengthened at both the national and global levels to ensure that users' health data is safeguarded.

The momentum for regulatory change is intensifying. Advocates are calling on authorities to enforce stronger privacy protections, recognising that the current landscape is fraught with risks for women and their health data. As the momentum for period tracker apps continues to grow, better governance and safety regulations will be necessary to protect users.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jun/11/public-health-bodies-urged-launch-period-tracking-apps-protect-data), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/sep/07/uk-data-watchdog-to-review-period-and-fertility-apps-amid-security-concerns)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jun/11/public-health-bodies-urged-launch-period-tracking-apps-protect-data), [[4]](https://www.phillyvoice.com/period-tracking-app-privacy-data-abortion-roe-v-wade/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jun/11/public-health-bodies-urged-launch-period-tracking-apps-protect-data), [[3]](https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2022/07/federal-patient-privacy-law-doesnt-cover-most-period-tracking-apps/), [[6]](https://truthout.org/articles/privacy-experts-warn-data-from-period-tracking-apps-may-soon-be-used-against-you/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jun/11/public-health-bodies-urged-launch-period-tracking-apps-protect-data), [[5]](https://www.tampabay.com/news/health/2022/05/24/could-the-data-in-your-period-tracking-app-be-used-against-you/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jun/11/public-health-bodies-urged-launch-period-tracking-apps-protect-data), [[7]](https://www.hipaajournal.com/ftc-urged-to-enforce-breach-notification-rule-when-fertility-tracking-apps-share-user-data-without-consent/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[6]](https://truthout.org/articles/privacy-experts-warn-data-from-period-tracking-apps-may-soon-be-used-against-you/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jun/11/public-health-bodies-urged-launch-period-tracking-apps-protect-data> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/sep/07/uk-data-watchdog-to-review-period-and-fertility-apps-amid-security-concerns> - The UK's Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) is reviewing period and fertility tracking apps due to user concerns over data security. A survey revealed that half of women using these apps worry about how their data is used. The ICO aims to identify potential harms, including unclear privacy policies and unnecessary data collection, and will take regulatory action if necessary to protect the public.
3. <https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2022/07/federal-patient-privacy-law-doesnt-cover-most-period-tracking-apps/> - Following the Supreme Court's decision overturning Roe v. Wade, concerns have arisen about the use of data from period-tracking apps in legal actions. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) does not cover most of these apps, leaving users' sensitive health data unprotected. This gap in federal privacy laws has led to calls for stronger regulations to safeguard personal health information.
4. <https://www.phillyvoice.com/period-tracking-app-privacy-data-abortion-roe-v-wade/> - Period-tracking apps like Cycles and Clue are addressing user concerns about data privacy, especially regarding sensitive information such as pregnancies and abortions. Some states have laws granting users control over their data, but issues persist with data brokers potentially accessing and selling this information. Users are advised to review app privacy policies and consider alternatives that prioritise data security.
5. <https://www.tampabay.com/news/health/2022/05/24/could-the-data-in-your-period-tracking-app-be-used-against-you/> - Concerns have emerged about the potential misuse of data from period-tracking apps, particularly in states with restrictive abortion laws. Apps like Cycles and Clue assure users of data privacy, but issues remain with data brokers accessing and selling sensitive information. Users are encouraged to review app privacy policies and consider alternatives that prioritise data security.
6. <https://truthout.org/articles/privacy-experts-warn-data-from-period-tracking-apps-may-soon-be-used-against-you/> - Privacy experts warn that data from period-tracking apps could be used against individuals in states where abortion is criminalised. The lack of federal protections for such data raises concerns about its potential use in legal actions. Advocates call for stronger privacy laws to protect users' sensitive health information from misuse.
7. <https://www.hipaajournal.com/ftc-urged-to-enforce-breach-notification-rule-when-fertility-tracking-apps-share-user-data-without-consent/> - The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) is urged to enforce the Health Breach Notification Rule against fertility tracking apps that share user data without consent. Instances of apps like Flo and Premom disclosing personal health information without user approval highlight the need for stricter enforcement to protect users' privacy.