Actions a patient can take to protect their health information, _including_ their reproductive health information

In June 2022, the United States Supreme Court's decision to overturn Roe v. Wade led to legal restrictions against some reproductive health services in many states across the United States. Stanford Medicine operates in California, where laws protect and enable comprehensive reproductive services for our patients.

No matter where our patients live or receive care, they may wish to limit access to information about their personal health. Patients can take the following actions to protect the privacy of their health information, including their reproductive health information:

1   **Avoid posting questions on social media applications** (Facebook, Instagram, SnapChat, Tiktok, etc.) about pregnancy, missed period, pregnancy options, abortion or abortion providers.

2   **Delete period tracking applications** from your devices and disable period tracking on athletic and health tracking apps.

3   **Be sure to close out your internet browser tabs** after visiting websites that may contain information on reproductive health services, abortion, abortion providers, pregnancy termination, etc., and clear your cookies and web browser history on all devices (laptop, desktop, phones, and tablets) after each search.
- ✓ Use a browser with the strongest privacy measures, such as Tor, Firefox, Safari, or Brave, instead of Chrome or Microsoft Edge.
- ✓ For searches, use a search engine such as DuckDuckGo, Brave Search, or Startpage instead of Google or Bing.
- ✓ Use a VPN (virtual private network) connection. Instructions are available here: https://blog.avast.com/using-mobile-vpn-on-iphone-or-android

4   **Turn off access to location services for all applications on your phone or tablet.** This will increase the privacy of your activities but may limit the functionality of the application. More information on this and protecting health privacy on your phone is available here: https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/privacy/guidance/cell-phone-hipaa/index.html

5   **Use a text messaging service with end-to-end encryption** and that does not store a copy of messages (e.g., Signal).

6   **Check your patient portal settings.** If you use a patient portal such as MyHealth or MyChart to communicate with your health care provider, schedule appointments, or view your appointments, labs, medications, or notes, check your settings to see if you have given proxy access to a family member or spouse.
- ✓ If you have, you may want to deactivate their proxy access or deactivate the portal account.
- ✓ You can also ask your provider to not share notes related to your reproductive health care in Epic Open Notes.

7 **Opt-out of participation in Health Information Exchange (HIE) platforms.** Many health care organizations, providers and even health insurance companies participate in HIE for treatment and payment purposes, and in many states, patients and their health data are "in" the HIE unless the patient specifically opts out of participation. These HIEs allow providers to access their patient's health information related to care obtained across the United States. Stanford Medicine employs information exchange in certain situations. For information about the opt-out process, please contact our Health Information Management Services department at **650-723-5721**. For Stanford Medicine Partners, please contact **510-731-2676**.

Resources:
Patient Health Information Exchange Handout
Patient Health Information Exchange Exemption Form
Patient Request to Rescind Health Information Exchange Exemption Form

8 **If possible, choose to pay cash for your reproductive health care services.**
- ✓ If you use your health insurance, details on the claim that is sent to the health plan for payment will contain information on the nature of the service(s) you receive.
- ✓ If your health insurance is through a parent or spouse, they may be able to obtain information about the services you receive through the statement or explanation of benefits the plan sends to the subscriber.
- ✓ In California, you can opt out of sharing sensitive services, such as reproductive health care, by submitting a request to your insurance company.

9 **Check with your provider to learn more about their process for restrictions.** The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) provides patients with the right to request a restriction on how the clinic/provider/hospital uses or discloses your protected health information.

Stanford Medicine's Health Information Management departments are experts in this. For more information:
- ✓ Stanford Health Care: https://stanfordhealthcare.org/for-patients-visitors/medical-records.html
- ✓ Stanford Medicine Children's Health: https://www.stanfordchildrens.org/en/patient-family-resources/medical-records

For more information:
- How to protect your privacy on apps - https://consumer.ftc.gov/articles/how-protect-your-privacy-apps
- Your rights under HIPAA - https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-individuals/guidance-materials-for-consumers/index.html
- Submitting requests to insurers to restrict information sharing - https://myhealthmyinfo.org
- Health and Human Services (HHS) guidance to protect patient privacy in wake of Supreme Court decision on Roe - https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2022/06/29/hhs-issues-guidance-to-protect-patient-privacy-in-wake-of-supreme-court-decision-on-roe.html

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