Age assurance: the facts

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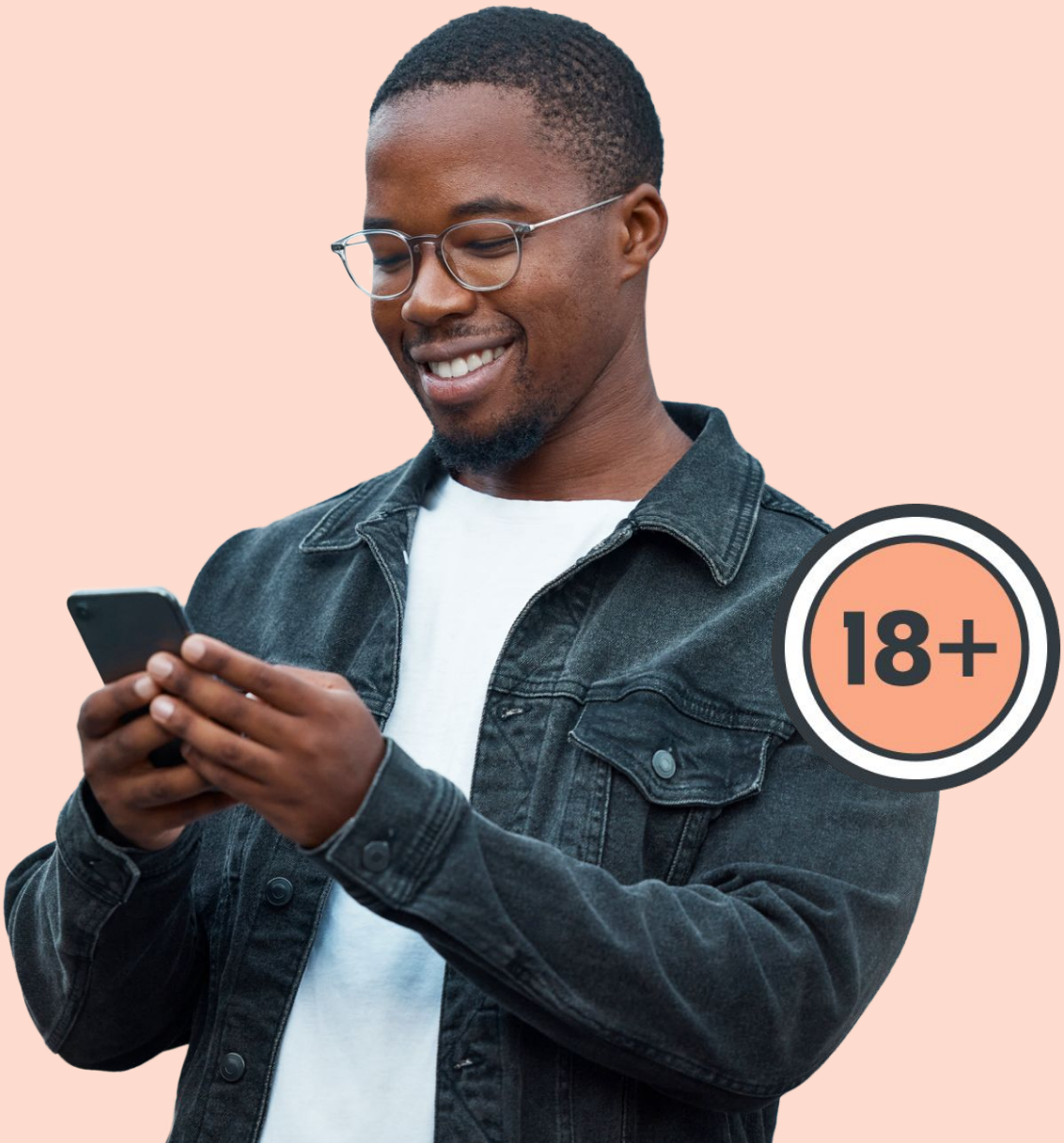

Age assurance: the facts

- The technology exists to prove your age online in a secure and private way
- You can prove your age online without sharing lots of personal details
- There's a range of age assurance methods; most businesses will offer you a choice of options, letting you choose how you prove your age
- Age assurance methods are quick and seamless; some take as little as one second
- Age assurance is already being used around the world to protect young people and create age-appropriate experiences
- There are are privacy-friendly, reusable age assurance approaches

Around the world, regulators are introducing online safety and age checking laws to protect minors online. But myths, confusion, and misinformation still persist. Some people believe that age assurance can't be done without creating a privacy nightmare. After years of evidence, debate, and discussion, it's a shame that these misconceptions still exist. In reality, the challenge of checking someone's age online in a privacy-preserving way has been solved.

In this paper, we address some of the common concerns around age assurance.

1

Myth: Age assurance isn't private.

Fact: Age assurance methods operate with strict privacy standards.

Let's begin by explaining what age assurance is. Age assurance refers to various methods which determine a person's age or age range. It spans age verification, estimation and inference. Age verification includes methods such as a digital ID app, a credit card, and photo ID documents like a passport or driving licence. Age estimation methods include face, voice, palm or email age estimation.

A common concern around proving age online is that it puts our privacy at risk. But a range of age assurance approaches allow you to complete an age check without revealing your full identity. For instance, you can prove you're 18+ without ever telling anyone your name, address, or even your date of birth. With facial age estimation, you just take a quick selfie.

Once the technology has estimated your age from that image, the selfie is deleted. So there is no database of images or personal data. We have completed over 850 million of these age checks and every single image has been deleted. We have published white papers which detail our liveness detection and anti-injection detection approaches and frequently asked questions.

Methods like this are actually *more private* than real-life checks. When you need to prove your age in a bar, currently you have to show an identity document to the bartender. But the bartender sees your full ID - which includes information like your full name and home address. But with facial age estimation, you don't need to share personal information like this, and no data is saved after you've completed the age check.

Age assurance methods operate with strict privacy standards. They do not store or keep users' personal information. Many regulators are even drafting laws that require platforms, websites and age assurance providers to delete personal data immediately after an age check.

You can verify the credibility of an age provider by checking if they are certified by reputable organisations such as the Age Check Certification Scheme (ACCS) to follow strict privacy and security protocols.

2

Myth: It forces people to hand over personal information or use identity documents every time they need to prove their age.

Fact: Many age assurance methods allow users to share only their age or age range, without revealing any other personal details.

A range of methods allow users to share only their age or age range (for example ‘over 13’ or ‘over 18’) without sharing any other personal information. This means a website knows nothing else about you during the age check. They don’t learn your name, your address or even your full date of birth. Only the fact that you are under or over a certain age.

Additionally, not all methods require you to use an identity document. Facial age estimation is one such approach. This gives you a way to prove your age, without sharing identity documents or personal details like your name or date of birth. Document-free methods also address inclusion concerns; people without documents can still complete age checks.

With the Yoti Digital ID app, you only ever share the details you need - and nothing more. You can share *only* a verified age range, such as 18+, depending on what’s required. It's quick, secure, and privacy-friendly.

3

Myth: Age assurance creates too much friction and will be too difficult for some people.

Fact: A facial age estimation check takes around one second.

In the offline world, we're familiar with proving our age when purchasing alcohol, tobacco, or entering age-restricted venues like nightclubs and casinos. While the system isn't perfect - some people may use fake IDs or staff may misjudge a person's age - it still provides a layer of protection that prevents minors from accessing age-restricted goods and services.

Online, the same principle applies. Surely, it's better to have *some* age checks in place rather than nothing at all? More effective age checks mean children are better protected from inappropriate, harmful content online.

Many age assurance methods are designed to be as easy to use as possible. For example, Yoti facial age estimation is fast - look into the camera on your device and your age is estimated in about one second.

There are also a number of reusable approaches that reduce friction. For example, with our Digital ID app, you can prove your age in seconds, without verifying your age from scratch every time.

4

Myth: People will use a VPN to bypass age checks.

Fact: While some determined users may try to use VPNs, strong enforcement and deterrents still make age checks effective and valuable.

While it's true that some technically-savvy individuals may attempt this, it does not undermine the overall goal of age assurance — which is to significantly reduce the chances of children stumbling across pornography or other inappropriate content by accident.

The primary policy objective is harm reduction — not achieving perfect enforcement for every edge case. No system is entirely foolproof, whether offline or online. Yet, just as children can sometimes sneak into age-restricted films or use fake IDs, that doesn't mean age gates should be abandoned altogether. The presence of well-implemented barriers still plays a critical role in raising the threshold and preventing casual or accidental exposure.

Certain regulations, such as the UK Online Safety Act, make it an offence to allow children in the UK to access pornography — regardless of how they get there, whether directly, via a VPN, or by any other workaround. This shifts responsibility onto adult sites to ensure that children cannot access such material from within the UK, even if a VPN is used.

In practical terms, many major online platforms already block known VPN traffic. Services like BBC iPlayer, Netflix, and others use established techniques to detect and prevent access from commonly used or suspicious VPN IP addresses. These include maintaining updated blocklists and monitoring for high-volume traffic from known IP pools. Even as some VPN providers offer more advanced or harder-to-detect services, these tend to be expensive, creating another layer of friction and financial deterrent — especially for children and teens.

Finally, if a child attempts to subscribe to a paid VPN using a parent’s credit card, the transaction will typically appear on billing statements, creating a secondary point of parental oversight. In short, while VPNs may allow circumvention in isolated cases, they are not a silver bullet. Age assurance systems, combined with legal accountability and technical safeguards, can still dramatically reduce online harms — particularly accidental exposure — which is the fundamental aim.

5

Myth: It will create a database of personal information.

Fact: Reputable age providers are not building large databases of personal information.

Age assurance methods are built to be as secure and private as possible. The design of these methods means that only the age result is passed to the platform. For example, if a user proves they are 18+ to access an adult platform, the website would only know that this particular user is over 18. The website and age provider only know one thing: "This user is over 18." Not who they are, where they came from, or what else they viewed.

Many of these systems don’t even keep data beyond the check — and in countries like the UK and Germany, that’s not just policy, it’s law. If no data is saved, there is no database of personal information. Our focus is on data minimisation along with our simple security stance, "If the data isn't stored, it can't be hacked".

6

Myth: Age assurance doesn't work for children.

Fact: Age assurance works for all ages, including children and teens.

Although children and some younger people are less likely to have an identity document like a driving licence to prove their age, other methods, such as facial age estimation, are more inclusive.

Facial age estimation is accurate for children and teens. In fact, our technology correctly estimates 99.3% of 13-17-year-olds as being under 21, making it an effective tool for online age assurance. We've been named as having the most accurate facial age estimation for 13-16 year olds by NIST (National Institute of Standards and Technology), a key age group regulators are focused on.

The technology is also effective for the threshold of 13 years. The True Positive Rate for 6-12 year olds correctly estimated as under 13 is 99.5%.

A growing number of platforms are using this technology to create age-appropriate experiences for young people. For instance:

- **Social network Yubo** uses facial age estimation to help verify the age of every user on the platform at registration. This allows them to effectively use age gating to create safer, trusted spaces for young people aged 13-17, and different spaces for those aged 18+.
- **Modak, a fintech platform for teens,** leverages the technology to ensure only those under 18 can sign up, helping to provide secure financial services tailored for young users.
- **Social network Instagram** uses facial age estimation to help place users under 18 into Teen Accounts. These Accounts have built-in protections and are given the strictest privacy settings.

Another suitable method is a reusable Digital ID app (such as Yoti ID, Post Office EasyID or Lloyds Bank Smart ID). Teenagers can use an identity document, such as a passport (which 86% of 13 year olds in the UK own) or a PASS card, to set up their Digital ID and then easily and securely prove their 13+ status from their phone.

7

Myth: It will be too inconvenient to prove my age online every time.

Fact: Yoti Keys give people continued access to age-restricted websites.

Many age checks are completed quickly, taking only a few seconds. For example, in a few taps you can prove your age with our Digital ID app.

And with Yoti Keys, you can verify your age once and gain continued access to different websites, without having to prove your age again. Think of it like a festival wristband. You show you're 18 at the entrance, then you move freely.

The Yoti Key doesn't store any personal information, allowing people to remain anonymous but verified. The user proves their age, an anonymous Yoti Key is created and stored on their device. They can then visit other websites that accept Yoti Keys, without having to prove their age from scratch.

With fast, privacy-preserving solutions, proving age online doesn't have to be a hassle.

8

Myth: Age tokens don't work in incognito or private browsing modes.

Fact: Yoti Keys enable seamless and private age verification across all browsing modes, including incognito.

A common concern is that age tokens may not function in incognito or private browsing modes, potentially hindering user access. While traditional age tokens might face limitations in such modes, Yoti Keys are designed to overcome this challenge. By storing the age verification credential securely on the user's device using passkey technology, Yoti Keys allow users to verify their age once and gain continued access to participating websites, regardless of the browsing mode. This ensures a seamless and private user experience across all browsers.

Yoti Keys do not store any personal information, maintaining user anonymity while providing verified access. This approach aligns with privacy-first principles and supports compliance with global online safety regulations.

By leveraging Yoti Keys, users can enjoy uninterrupted access to age-restricted content in a manner that is both user-friendly and respectful of their privacy, even when using incognito or private browsing modes.

Final thoughts

Online age assurance is no longer a theoretical challenge - it's a practical, privacy-preserving reality. The technology is already used worldwide to create safer digital environments while respecting user privacy.

By choosing certified and privacy-focused age assurance providers, businesses and people can enjoy seamless, secure, and effective age checks that strike the right balance between privacy and user experience.

Rather than fearing age checks, we should welcome them as an important tool in protecting young users online - without compromising our privacy or convenience.

If you have any questions about online age checks, please get in touch.

Memberships, associations and accreditations

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