Comcast is reportedly developing a device that would track your bathroom habits

Comcast is reportedly working on a device designed to closely monitor a user's health. That's according to CNBC, which says the conglomerate is set to begin piloting the product sometime this year before a full launch in 2020. Having one of the most powerful telecom empires in the world tracking your health and lifestyle sure has an unsettling, dystopian ring to it.

"The device will monitor people's basic health metrics using ambient sensors, with a focus on whether someone is making frequent trips to the bathroom or spending more time than usual in bed," CNBC's report says. "Comcast is also building tools for detecting falls, which are common and potentially fatal for seniors."

Many products on the market today already have the motion sensors, cameras, and other hardware that allow for what Comcast seems to be envisioning – but not even Amazon or Google have directly sought to keep such a close eye on their customers' personal health with their respective Echo and Home devices. Comcast itself already offers home security services, and the company's much-touted X1 voice remote for its Xfinity cable platform has helped Comcast make advancements in recognizing and processing voice commands.

According to CNBC, Comcast's speaker won't offer functionality like controlling smart home devices, nor will it have the ability to search for answers to a person's questions on the

internet. But it will reportedly “have a personality like Alexa” and be able to place calls to emergency services. Some startups have already had similar ideas for Alexa speakers.

But in an email to *The Verge*, a Comcast spokesperson said the company’s upcoming device “is NOT a smart speaker” and “is purpose-built to be a sensor that detects motion.”

It’s said that Comcast aims to offer the device and a companion health tracking service to “at-risk people, including seniors and people with disabilities.” The company is also in discussions with hospitals about potentially “using the device to ensure that patients don’t end up back in the hospital after they’ve been discharged.” Your ISP, doctors, and insurers all having a direct, unfettered view into your day-to-day vitals? Nothing about this story is very reassuring. Fixing the US health care system and lowering the cost of medical care seem like better end goals than keeping people away from emergency rooms.

While Amazon hasn’t yet gone down this path with its consumer line of Alexa-enabled smart speakers, the online retail giant has shown a major interest in health care. Amazon recently announced that Alexa is now capable of handling certain patient health information, allowing users to check on prescriptions, monitor blood sugar levels, and more.

But Comcast is different. Comcast has long worn the unwanted crown of America’s most-hated company. It’s not hard to see Comcast pushing this health-tracking speaker on people during regular cable installations or customer service visits — or insurance companies enticing customers to accept this level of surveillance in exchange for cheaper rates. And if either decides that you’ve been heading for the bathroom too often or sleeping more than usual, well, what happens then? It’s all very ominous, even if Comcast would have to comply with HIPAA and other strict patient data laws. There’s absolutely a place for tools and technology like this to exist and help seniors

live independently for longer. But… Comcast?

“There is no role for this device beyond health,” the Comcast spokesperson wrote to *The Verge*.

Disclosure: Comcast is an investor in Vox Media, The Verge*’s parent company.*

Update May 21st, 5:03PM ET: *The article has been updated with comment from Comcast and to remove references to the upcoming device as a smart speaker.*

https://www.theverge.com/2019/5/21/18634466/comcast-health-monitoring-speaker-amazon-echo