

Microsoft's Skype sees massive increase in usage as coronavirus spreads

People are turning to Skype and other internet chat apps as the pandemic forces social distancing.

Hundreds of millions of people are staying indoors, isolated from one another, in an effort to slow the spread of the pandemic coronavirus and keep hospitals from being overwhelmed with patients. To keep in touch, people have been turning to social networks such as Facebook and its WhatsApp and Instagram subsidiaries. Slack, a popular chat app for business, as well as its competitor Microsoft Teams, have also attracted millions of new users hoping to keep connected with colleagues while working from home.



Now, Microsoft says its video chat and calling app Skype is seeing a flood of interest as well. The company says 40 million people are using Skype daily now, up 70% from just a month ago. The company said it's seen a 220% increasing in Skype-to-Skype calls, too. All told, the company said it tallied 200 million active users in the past six months.

"Staying connected with our loved ones has never been more important than it is right now," said Yusuf Mehdi, a Microsoft VP who helps head up its search, devices and "modern life" initiatives. He noted that Skype's most recent feature, called "Meet Now," lets people create video meetups through their web browser, without forcing other participants to sign up or download software.

The latest data point underscores how much people are turning to technology amid the virus that has upended daily life around the globe. Hundreds of millions of people are on government-mandated lockdowns, forced

home from school and work. So they've turned to video chat apps such as Zoom, WhatsApp, Apple's FaceTime, Microsoft Teams and Skype to keep in touch.

On Sunday, the US government extended its recommended social distancing guidelines until at least April 30, meaning people will be isolated through Passover and Easter, if not longer. And they'll likely look to video chat services like Skype to continue helping to fill the gaps.

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