

# UK developing coronavirus-tracking app to ease lockdown restrictions

The opt-in app would use Bluetooth to record when people come in contact with someone with the coronavirus and then let them know to self-isolate.

The UK is reportedly mulling the introduction of a contact-tracking app that'll alert people if they've been near someone with the coronavirus and should therefore self-isolate.

A report by Sky News on Tuesday described how NHSX, the innovation arm of the UK's National Health Service, has teamed with US company Pivotal to develop the app, which could be released when the British government eases the current lockdown restrictions. According to Sky, people will have to opt in to use the app, though the NHS hopes at least 50% of the population will choose to do so.



"NHSX is looking at whether app-based solutions might be helpful in tracking and managing coronavirus, and we have assembled expertise from inside and outside the organization to do this as rapidly as possible," said an NHSX spokesman.

Once downloaded onto someone's phone, the app would work by using Bluetooth signals to keep an anonymized record of all the other devices it comes into contact with. If people with the app later test positive for coronavirus, they could allow all the folks they've been near to be informed, so those people could self-isolate.

The hope is that if people use the app and inform others when they need to quarantine themselves, the stringent lockdown measures that've now been in place in the UK for a week would no longer be necessary.

Tracking who could've been exposed is known as "contact tracing," and that's a common approach to preventing the spread of disease. It was previously used, for example, to manage ebola outbreaks. Still, bringing any kind of tracking technology into the equation can pose privacy concerns. The NHS is seeking to address such worries by relying on Bluetooth rather than GPS, installing an ethics board to oversee the app and not regularly uploading the contacts to a central database.

Singapore is currently using a similar app, called TraceTogether, and Ireland is reportedly rolling out its own version of the app in coming days.

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