

COVID-19 contact tracing app released

By Grant Cameron

A COVID Alert exposure notification app for Ontario residents has been released by the provincial government. [Click here](#) to download the app for Android and [click here](#) for the iPhone version.

The app will tell you whether you've been near someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 over the previous two weeks.

The app was explained during a webinar in July sponsored by RESCON, the Construction and Design Alliance of Ontario (CDAO) and the Construction Employers Coalition (CEC). More than 150 people tuned in to the 90-minute event.

Jacob Korenblum, head of policy for Ontario Digital Service, provided an overview of the app and noted it's a critical part of Canada's recovery plan.

In a nutshell, the app uses technology to notify users if they have come into contact with someone who tested positive for coronavirus. Once downloaded, it runs in the background.

When two app users are near each other, their phones use Bluetooth to exchange an anonymized, encrypted digital handshake, without collecting any personal information or location data.

The app stores the information for 21 days and doesn't gather addresses or phone numbers or collect anyone's location or personal health information.

If an app user tests positive, they can choose to retrieve a security code and anonymously notify all users they've been near in the past two weeks by entering information into the app.

Other users who may have been near a COVID-positive person receive an alert on their phone, directing them to public health guidance and next steps.

To prevent misreporting, the code is only available to a person with a confirmed COVID-19 lab result from public health authorities.

"The key priority for this app to succeed is user trust," said Korenblum. "The more people that use it the more effective it is."

Determining whether a user may have been exposed to COVID-19 – and when to notify them of potential exposure – is based on key variables defined by Apple and Google, for all countries/regions that use their platform:

- The cumulative duration of the exposure between a user and other diagnosed user(s);
- The number of days that have elapsed since the exposure(s);
- The distance between the user and a person with COVID-19; and
- Each of these categories can be weighted with a value between zero and eight, enabling Ontario's health officials to determine the appropriate calibration for meaningful exposure in the province.

Korenblum said the app is designed with a single purpose in mind and that is to notify Ontarians when they've been exposed to COVID-19.