



contact tracing: covid-19

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As the individual states struggle to define how best to reopen in a manner that minimizes the renewed spread of the novel coronavirus/COVID-19, the subject of contact tracing has become a major focus. To aid in this effort, Apple and Google announced late last week a joint contact tracing project that would leverage Bluetooth technology to identify and selectively alert individuals who have been in close proximity to someone who tested positive for COVID-19. Once alerted, that user could self-isolate or seek testing. Individuals who are diagnosed with COVID-19 can self-report their diagnosis, and any users who have been in recent contact with that individual will receive a notification. Public health agencies would be responsible for checking and verifying test results provided by users in order to prevent spoofing or fabrication.

Contact tracing has long been "a central pillar" of traditional infectious disease control. It works by identifying everyone a sick person may have potentially exposed, with the goal of identifying newly infected individuals before they become infectious to others. Such tracing, for example, was instrumental during the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa. As applied to a fast moving respiratory virus like SARS-CoV-2, however, traditional contact tracing by way of in-person interviews simply cannot keep pace. Hence, the need for a technological solution.

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