



AN OPINION EDITORIAL

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Health Secretary: Technology Can Help Mitigate Spread of COVID-19, Add Your Phone to the Fight

By: Dr. Rachel L. Levine, Secretary of Health for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Technology connects us to resources and plays a powerful role in our lives. And at no time is technology more important than during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pennsylvanians listen to our press briefings, gather data from our enhanced [statewide](#) and [early warning monitoring dashboards](#), and follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) for the most up-to-date information.

Still, COVID-19 continues to impact our state. Nearly 142,885 Pennsylvanians have been diagnosed with COVID-19 so far, and we are still seeing cases increase each day.

It is upon each of us to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Here in Pennsylvania, we are adding another tool in the toolbox residents can use to protect themselves and their loved ones: COVID Alert PA, an app that uses Bluetooth technology to notify you of a potential COVID-19 exposure.

This app uses Bluetooth technology, the same technology that helps your phone connect with your car to play music or use wireless headphones. This technology does not track or collect any location data or personal data from your phone – only your phone's proximity to other phones with the app enabled. It is strictly designed to notify you if you may have been in close contact with someone who tested positive for the virus. If you test positive for the virus, and you choose to confirm that information into the app, it will notify those that may have been in close contact with you.

Often, it can be difficult for someone to either name or even know all the close contacts they were exposed to while they were infectious -- like a person you spoke to for 15 minutes at the bar or someone you sat next to on the bus. This is where COVID Alert PA becomes extremely useful and augments value to the state's contact tracing efforts.

When an individual tests positive for COVID-19, a public health professional from the Pennsylvania Department of Health or a county and municipal health department contacts them to begin a case investigation. During the investigation the individual learns about their test results and is asked to recall who they have been in close contact with during their infectious period.

The public health professional also will encourage the COVID-19 positive individual to open the COVID Alert PA and enter a six-digit validation code. After the validation is complete, the app will alert other individuals who were within six feet of the COVID-19 positive individual for at least 15 minutes.

Anyone getting an exposure alert is provided with public health advice and resources to talk to a public health professional about next steps or how to find the nearest testing site. People with a confirmed exposure are bound to have questions and concerns, and we want to provide the information people need to make informed decisions about their health and the health of the people closest to them.

Remember, all this is done through Bluetooth technology, which means no personal or identifying information will be collected through the app. The person notified will not know the identity of the person to whom they were exposed.

The Wolf Administration has taken additional measures to ensure the safety and well-being of Pennsylvanians. Now that the state is reopened, though mitigation efforts remain in place, there is still an opportunity for COVID-19 to spread, so we need to prepare ourselves by washing hands, wearing masks, practicing social distancing and downloading the COVID Alert PA app. The more people who download the app, the better our chances are of preventing an outbreak and keeping our communities healthy.

When the app is available later this month, please download it through the Google Play or Apple App Store and add your phone to the fight to help stop the spread of COVID-19.

Together, we can help ourselves, our loved ones and our neighbors across the commonwealth stay safe.

For pictures and videos of Dr. Levine sharing more about the COVID Alert PA app, please visit www.PACast.com.

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