

Tracking COVID-19 by smartphone

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Oregon State University (OSU) is teaming up with the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) to test a smartphone-based system that notifies users about possible exposure to COVID-19.

OSU faculty, staff and students can participate exclusively in the Oregon Exposure Notifications pilot program before it is available to cellphone users throughout Oregon. The system, which was developed by Google and Apple and uses the Bluetooth capability of smartphones, is already being tested or used in many other states, including California, Colorado, Washington and Virginia.

Use of the system is completely optional and users can turn it off or deactivate the app at any time. The system does not collect, track or store users' location information or personal information.

"We appreciate the opportunity to collaborate with Oregon Health Authority to test this system at Oregon State. It is another important tool in our efforts to protect one another and to slow the spread of COVID-19 in our community," OSU Vice President for University Relations and Marketing Steve Clark said. "Our students, faculty and staff have demonstrated their commitment to public health efforts throughout the pandemic and their participating in this pilot program is another way they can make a positive impact."

The exposure notifications system quickly alerts users when they may have been in close proximity, through day-to-day interactions, to someone who might have exposed them to COVID-19. The system does not

replace traditional contact tracing efforts.

System users will receive confidential alerts if they were in contact for a sustained period of time with another participant who has tested positive for COVID-19. Participants also can quickly and anonymously alert other users if they test positive.

The Exposure Notifications system is embedded in Apple devices using iOS 13.7 or higher and requires an app for Android-based phones. The technology was designed to protect user privacy and no personal information is exchanged between users' devices.

If a user receives an alert about potential exposure, they also will receive information about important health steps to take next. Participants in the Oregon State pilot program who receive an exposure notification will be invited to get a free follow-up COVID-19 test through TRACE-OSU, the university's COVID-19 testing program.

Since the exposure notifications system became available to OSU students, faculty and staff earlier this month, nearly 5,000 people have installed it; about 3,800 using Apple iOS systems and about 1,000 using Android devices

The pilot program is expected to last four to six weeks. It is intended to help officials understand how the exposure notifications system can best support the health of Oregonians. If the system is found to be helpful for public health efforts, continued work toward statewide implementation is planned.

For more information about the pilot program, visit: beav.es/enx.

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