

Health Security Committee meeting 15 April

Discussion of toolbox on mobile applications to support contact tracing and warning in the EU's fight against COVID-19

Purpose and objectives

The purpose of this agenda point will be to present to the Health Security Committee the EU toolbox on mobile applications to support contact tracing and warning in the EU's fight against COVID-19, developed by the eHealth Network, with the support of the Commission. Contact tracing and warning apps can play a key role in all phases of the crisis management, especially as part of a bundle of tools during the gradual lifting of containment measures. Those apps have to be well-coordinated and fully compliant with all applicable EU rules, including those on privacy and data protection. Their positive impact can be boosted by a strategy supporting wider testing of persons showing symptoms. Considering that EU citizens move across borders, interoperable apps for contact tracing would allow the use across regions and country borders.

Key issues and background

The common Union toolbox consists of: essential requirements for national apps and cross-border interoperability; provisions to ensure accessibility and inclusiveness for the digitally excluded or citizens who are harder to reach; specific governance mechanisms to be applied by public health authorities, including engagement and approval of tracing apps; sharing data with relevant epidemiological public bodies, including aggregated data to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control; measures to avoid proliferation of harmful applications, and promotion of common solutions.

Several Member States adopted tracing apps. Some promising initiatives, such as PEPP-PT - Pan-European Privacy-Preserving Proximity Tracing – #Tracing¹ support international interoperability to support tracing local infection chains even if a chain spans multiple PEPP-PT participating countries. On 10 April 2020, Google and Apple jointly announced an initiative related to the use of the Bluetooth protocol to support contact tracing apps.² The protocol would support the use of Bluetooth LE (Low Energy) for proximity detection of nearby mobile phones that would alert participants of possible exposure to someone who they have recently been in contact with, and who has subsequently been positively diagnosed as having the virus.³

¹ <https://www.pepp-pt.org/>; <https://github.com/DP-3T/documents/blob/master/DP3T%20White%20Paper.pdf>

² <https://www.apple.com/newsroom/2020/04/apple-and-google-partner-on-covid-19-contact-tracing-technology/> The announcement included the publication of three draft technical documents on Bluetooth and cryptography specifications and framework documentation.

³ To implement the protocol, in May, they intend to launch application programming interfaces (APIs) and operating system-level technology that enable interoperability between Android and iOS devices for such apps that support contact tracing apps and that are officially approved by public health authorities. As a second step, in the coming months, they intend to build this functionality into the underlying platforms of their operating systems, which users of the device could opt into. The companies promised to provide further information but did not commit to release the source code.

The protocol excludes processing of any location data – unless the user opts in, applies 'Rolling Proximity Identifiers' that prevent identification of the user, processes proximity identifiers obtained from other devices exclusively on the device, permits only users to decide whether to contribute to contact tracing by sharing Diagnosis Keys with the 'Diagnosis Server' if diagnosed with COVID-19, resulting in the alert to other users.

Issues/specific questions for the HSC to consider at the meeting

We invite the HSC members to reply to the following questions at the next meeting on 15 April 2020:

1. We know from a survey among the eHealth Network members that many countries are presently considering to use a contact-tracing app⁴. If your country is envisaging to use such an app, would you be willing to share a common approach for interoperable solution at EU level?
2. How do you evaluate the current toolbox from the perspective of epidemiological support?
3. Would the health authorities be supporting the sharing of aggregated/anonymised data from the apps cross-borders?

Please send your suggestions to the Commission by 16 April close of business: [\[redacted\]@ec.europa.eu](mailto:(10)(2e)@ec.europa.eu)

⁴Matches stay local to the device are not revealed to the server. The details and implications of this announcement from a medical and privacy perspective requires further analysis and discussion.

⁴ See Section 3 and Annex IV of the toolbox document