Turn your smartphone into a life-saving device

Why are COVID Alert SA app users South Africa's new superheroes? They are building a powerful, life-saving network of anonymous people who are turning their smartphones into shields that help to protect everyone in the country from COVID-19.

Download COVID Alert SA App today.

The power is in your hands.

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Like many countries across the world, South Africa's National Department of Health has used Apple and Google's exposure notification framework to build our country's new Bluetooth contact-tracing app for COVID-19. The tech giants have, since April this year, worked together to develop a framework for governments, public health authorities and NGOs around the world to use, to custom-build local apps, and ultimately to empower ordinary citizens to work together to protect each other from COVID-19 infection.

South Africa's Bluetooth contact tracing app - COVID Alert SA – is now available for iOS and Android smartphones and can help tell you if you've been exposed to the COVID-19 virus.

The app is user-friendly all the way. User privacy and security are core to the Apple-Google framework on which the COVID Alert SA app has been built. That means app users are anonymous and the app never asks for, or stores their identifying personal details, or location.

What does the COVID Alert SA app do? How does it work?

The COVID Alert SA app uses Bluetooth contact-tracing technology to let people know when they have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 (a laboratory test shows they have COVID-19). It does this in a way that preserves app user privacy and anonymity at all times.

It gives every smartphone user in South Africa the chance to understand their exposure to the virus, so that we can all protect our families and our communities, and especially those people who are most at risk of severe disease.

What you need to know about the app:

- This app is free.
- Anyone in South Africa who has a Bluetooth-enabled smartphone with Andriod 6.0 or iOS 13.5 or later versions can use it.
- Downloading the app is quick and easy – it's under 3 MB.
- It does not feature in-app purchases.
- You don't have to pay for mobile data when you use the app. The data to use the app has been zero-rated by all of South Africa's mobile network providers.
- The app is the latest offering under our National Department of Health's COVIDConnect digital support service.

13 simple steps: Here's how the COVID Alert SA app works

Bluetooth contact tracing apps, like COVID Alert SA, replace the need for us to remember and identify close contacts by simply letting app users' smartphones give each other a "digital handshake" when they are nearby and create their own "memory" of this interaction between the devices. And, app users' identities are kept private at all times.

1. COVID Alert SA uses Bluetooth signals to exchange 'random codes' (these are just random numbers that change several times a day) with other COVID Alert SA app users.
2. This happens when app users' smartphones are within two metres of each other for more than 15 minutes.

3. This process happens whether app users are near to people that they know – such as when near to friends, family or colleagues – or to strangers – such as at the shops in a queue, or on public transport.
4. As long as the COVID Alert SA app is running on smartphones that are near enough to each other, they will share random codes – almost like they have given each other a digital handshake.
5. The random codes exchanged at the time of the 'digital handshake' are stored in a log on each phone for 16 days.
6. At no stage is the identity and location of the device users required for this exchange to happen. All that the COVID Alert SA app tracks is the proximity of smartphone devices to one another and how long they are in contact.
7. Then, when an app user contracts COVID-19 and a test shows they have the disease, they can choose to anonymously report this information to the app community. That kicks off the Bluetooth-based contact tracing process.
8. Their smartphone uploads the random codes that it has on record from the past 16 days to the Exposure Notification Server.
9. The Server sends these random codes to all other app users.
10. Each app user's device runs through these random codes to check for a match between these codes and the codes it has stored in the past 16 days (every time it has come into contact with another device using the COVID Alert SA app).
11. If there is a match, the device notifies the user that they have potentially been exposed to COVID-19, with the date on which they were in contact with someone who has tested positive.
12. App users also receive information on what to do next - to self-quarantine (for 14 days), watch for symptoms of COVID-19, and to optimise their health and wellbeing.
13. This all happens in a way that preserves the privacy of every app user at all times.

Why do we need to identify those who have been in contact with someone who has COVID-19?

Contact tracing is so important in our world right now. In the case of COVID-19, close contacts can be guided to self-quarantine for 14 days and monitor themselves for symptoms. If a close contact develops symptoms, with the knowledge that they may have been exposed, they can interact with a healthcare expert to seek the right medical assistance while also protecting others from the disease.

Many people who contract COVID-19 have no symptoms (are asymptomatic) or experience very mild illness, and so do not know that they have it and that they are exposing others to the virus.

They also do not know if they've exposed someone who is at high risk of severe illness if they contract COVID-19. High-risk individuals are people who are possibly immunocompromised (such as those who have HIV or TB, cancer survivors and transplant recipients), those who have chronic illnesses and those over the age of 60.

Why do we need apps to assist with the contract tracing process?

Manual contact tracing is a time-consuming process that has its limits. The person who tests positive for COVID-19 needs to remember all the people they have been in close contact with for the past two weeks and their contact details, which is not possible for people they come into contact with in public places such as the grocery store or public transport.

Why should I download and activate the COVID Alert SA app?

- **Understand your COVID-19 exposure risk.** When other app users you have had recent close contact with anonymously share a positive COVID-19 test result on the app, you will get an exposure notification alert on your smartphone.
- **You will get guidance on the next steps.** You will receive advice on what to do to keep your loved ones and your wider community safe, particularly those who are considered to be at high risk of a severe infection.
- **Contribute to avoiding a second wave of COVID-19 infections in South Africa, protecting South Africa's healthcare services and vulnerable people, and ending the pandemic.**

Important contact details

COVID-19 Public Hotline: 0800 029 999
WhatsApp Support Line: 0600-123456
Website: sacoronavirus.co.za
COVID Alert SA App information
Frequently Asked Questions