Ministry of Health

COVID Alert Exposure Notification App: Public Health Unit Q&A

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General

1. What is COVID Alert?

COVID Alert is an exposure notification app. Exposure notifications are alerts that people can receive on their cell phones letting them know they've been exposed to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19.

2. How does COVID Alert work?

If you have the app installed on your phone, your phone exchanges randomized codes with other phones that have the app when the phones are nearby. They do so by using your phone's Bluetooth feature. All you need to do is download the app, allow notifications, and have Bluetooth turned on. The app will run in the background, using minimal data and battery power.

There are several ways that users will interact with the app:

A. Getting Started

Users will download COVID Alert from the app store to their iPhone/Android device (from the App Store or Google Play).

- Once the app is downloaded, users open the app and give permission to enable notifications.
- Once set up, it runs in the background of the phone. No action is required unless the user has been exposed to or has tested positive for COVID-19.
- The app shares randomized codes with the phones of other app users that are near the user. The app doesn't collect or share any personal information such as the name, phone number, location, or testing status of a user. Data on the user's phone is stored for up to 14 days, at which point

it is destroyed. The data is encrypted and personal information is never collected or stored.

B. Exposure to a person who tests positive for COVID-19
- If the app detects that you've been within 2 metres of a user who has tested positive for COVID-19, for more than 15 minutes within the past two weeks, and that users chooses to send an alert, a notification will appear on your phone.
- The app will then provide you with the latest public health advice and resources, and recommended next steps (e.g. getting tested, self-isolating or self-monitoring for symptoms).
- The app cannot determine whether personal protective equipment (PPE) was worn during exposure.

C. When a user has tested positive for COVID-19

- If an app user tests positive for COVID-19, they can choose to notify other app users who have been within 2 metres of them for more than 15 minutes during the last 2 weeks, without sharing any personal information.
- To send notifications, an app user will first request a 10-digit "key" through ontario.ca/covidresults – the website where most Ontario COVID test results are available.
- The user can then choose to enter this key into the app. When they do, all users who have who have been within 2 metres of them for more than 15 minutes during the last 2 weeks will receive a notification.
- The notification contains no personal information: other app users never know the identity of the person they were in contact with that was recorded as an exposure, or the time, location or place of exposure.

3. Who is involved in developing this app?

The app was developed in partnership between the provincial government and the federal government, using free, open source software created by volunteers from Ontario tech company Shopify. It is built using the privacy-first Apple-Google

Exposure Notification platform. Volunteers from Blackberry have provided an external security review of the app.

4. Where can I get more information about COVID Alert?

General information can be found at ontario.ca/covidalert.

5. How does COVID Alert ensure user privacy?

The voluntary app does not collect or share the identity, personal information or location of any user. The app does not use GPS or track location data. Phones exchange randomized codes, and those codes are automatically destroyed after 14 days.

Users must explicitly choose to turn on exposure notifications and can turn them off at any time. Users also decide whether they want to send alerts to other app users who were near them, without sharing personal information, if they test positive for COVID-19. Users have full control of their information while using COVID Alert.

6. How will the app prevent false reporting of positive users/cases?

Users can only send alerts to other app users who have been near them if they obtain a confirmed positive test result and receive a one-time key through ontario.ca/covidresults - the website where most Ontario COVID test results are available.

Risk Exposure

7. How does the app determine whether or not someone was exposed?

The app determines whether users have been exposed, based on current public health guidance. Currently, any user who is within 2 metres of a user who has tested positive for COVID-19, for more than 15 minutes within the past two weeks, is deemed to have been exposed. Exposure alerts are only sent when a user who tests positive chooses to end them.

8. Will the app send different types of notifications based on the level of exposure?

No. All users who receive an alert that they have been exposed will be advised to get tested at their nearest assessment centre and self-isolate pending results.

9. If a user receives a notification that they were exposed to COVID-19, will they be alerted as to when the exposure occurred?

No, currently the app will not tell users when the exposure occurred. This decision has been made to ensure privacy of app users.

Public Health Units

10. Where does COVID Alert fit within case and contact management?

This app is meant to support and augment public health's existing contact tracing efforts by quickly identifying new contacts that may not have been easily identified through traditional case and contact management methods. Exposure notifications are not a substitute for traditional contact tracing, but the app can expand reach and rapidly notify unknown contacts and augment information available to contact tracers.

11. What should I do if I am contacted by someone who says they were notified they were exposed?

Public Health Units (PHUs) should encourage these callers to monitor their symptoms and seek a test for COVID-19 direct them to their nearest assessment centre which they can find at ontario.ca/covid. PHUs should advise these callers to self-isolate pending test results. More information can be found at ontario.ca/exposed.

12. If someone who received an exposure notification tests negative for COVID-19 are they still required to self-isolate?

If the individual tests negative for COVID-19 following an exposure notification alert, they are not required to self-isolate. They should self-monitor for 14 days from when they received the exposure notification alert. However, if this individual is also identified through routine contact management processes, they must follow the advice of the public health authority which may include re-testing and/or self-isolating as determined by public health.

13. If someone receives an alert and tests positive for COVID-19, when does their period of self-isolation begin?

The period of self-isolation should begin from the day that the individual got their COVID-19 test.

14. How can our PHU promote COVID Alert?

COVID Alert is an important part of Ontario's efforts to identify, test, trace and isolate cases. The app will be more successful if more Ontarians download and use it, and PHUs can play an important role in promoting the app. Promotion efforts can include:

- Highlighting the app through social media (Twitter, Facebook, etc.)
- Direct the public and patients to ontario.ca/covidalert
- Providing a link on the PHU website to more information on COVID Alert and incorporating promotional materials into upcoming COVID-19 communications
- Encouraging contacts to download COVID Alert (if they haven't already) through regular contact tracing phone calls by asking them to visit ontario.ca/covidalert for information and download links
- Distributing fact sheets and hanging posters in visible areas
- If you use digital communication with the public or patients append the following to the bottom of your communication to promote use of the app

- **Include the following in emails**

    Get the COVID Alert app and help stop the spread
    Get a phone alert if you have been exposed to COVID-19 (coronavirus),
    and let others know if you test positive, without sharing your identity.
    https://www.ontario.ca/covidalert

- **Include the following in SMS/Text**

    Get the COVID Alert app and help stop the spread
    https://www.ontario.ca/covidalert

15. What do I do if someone with a confirmed diagnosis is unable to access their proof of diagnosis key through the online lab results viewer?

It is anticipated that 90% of Ontarians are currently able to access their COVID-19 test results through the provincial online lab results viewer. In situations where a patient is unable to access their key through the lab results viewer (for example, has a Red and White health card), Ontario will provide options for public health authorities to obtain and distribute one-time keys from within their public health unit teams, including granting access to pre-identified staff to a federal portal to generate one-time keys. More information on this will be shared in the coming days.

16. Where can I direct users for tech support with the app?

The following federal support tools are available:

Federal COVID Alert webpage
https://www.canada.ca/en/public-
health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19/covid-
alert.html

Email: CDS-SNC@tbs-sct.gc.ca

Phone: 1-833-784-4397