

# Member Briefing

Number: 1561

**Title:** Launch of NHS COVID-19 App

**Summary:** NHS COVID-19 App helps its users know when and where they have been in contact with someone who has tested positive.

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This briefing today provides information on the new COVID-19 App which launches across the country on Thursday, 24 September.

The NHS COVID-19 app is part of the COVID-19 testing and contact tracing programme: the NHS Test and Trace service in England and the NHS Wales Test, Trace, Protect service in Wales.

Members are asked to download the app and encourage residents to download it too. The app can be downloaded onto smartphones from the Apple App Store or Google Play from Thursday.

Alongside traditional contact tracing, it will be used to notify users if they have previously been in contact with someone who later tests positive for coronavirus. The “Check-in” feature supports this functionality by anonymously alerting users who have been at the same venue at the same time.

Every additional contact that the app traces will improve the existing contact tracing service and help stop the spread of coronavirus. The app helps the NHS understand if the virus is spreading in an area, so local authorities can respond quickly to stop it spreading further.

The App has six key features:

- **Trace** - the app detects and logs other nearby app users using random unique IDs. If any of those users later test positive for COVID-19, there is an exposure alert with advice on what to do.
- **Alert** - When first registering for the app, users will be asked for the first half of their postcode. By checking the app every day, they will see whether their home is in a high-risk area for coronavirus.
- **Check in** - The app allows users to record when they visit a venue by “checking-in” on arrival, using a venue’s QR code. The app records the time

they spend at the venue without recording personal information. They will be alerted if they visit a venue where they have been in contact with COVID-19.

- **Symptoms** - If users feel unwell, they can use the app to check if their symptoms could be related to COVID-19.
- **Test** - If they have coronavirus symptoms, the app will take users to a website where they can book a test to see if they have COVID-19 or not.
- **Isolate** - If users have been advised by the app to self-isolate, the app provides a countdown timer so they can track how long they need to self-isolate. At the end of a self-isolation period, the app will send a notification reminder with a link to the latest advice.

When users first download the app, they will be asked for their postcode district. It will not track users or their location. It will not hold personal information about users. It does not have access to phone contacts or other personal information held on a phone. Nobody, including the government, will know the identity or location of users. The National Cyber Security Centre also checks the app is safe and secure to use.

The NHS COVID-19 app uses smartphone's existing "Exposure Logging" feature to work out if users have spent time near other app users who have gone on to test positive for COVID-19. For this to work, users' Bluetooth needs to be turned on: this will not drain phone batteries as the app uses "Bluetooth Low Energy".

Users' postcode district helps the app work out where the virus is spreading. An app user who tests positive for COVID-19 can choose if they want other app users to be alerted. A random unique ID will then be used to anonymously alert other app users who were in close contact with that person. This ensures the positive user's privacy and identity is protected. Using these random IDs means interactions with other app users remain private. No personal details about the users are revealed with this alert and their privacy and identity are always protected.

Users can delete the app and all the data it stores, whenever they choose.

It is optional for residents to download the app but every person who downloads the app will be helping in the fight against coronavirus.

Further information about the app is available at:  
<https://www.covid19.nhs.uk/pdf/introducing-the-app.pdf>

### **NHS QR code posters**

From 18 September, businesses and organisations were legally required to enforce the rule of six and log details of customers, visitors and staff for NHS Test and Trace. From 24 September, they will be legally required to display an official NHS QR code poster ahead of the launch of the COVID-19 app. Further information is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/venues-required-to-enforce-rule-of-6-nhs-qr-code-posters-and-contact-logs>

The official NHS QR code posters make it easier for people to check-in at different premises. If people check-in using the QR code poster they do not need to log in via any other route.

Businesses will be expected to make sure their customers are aware of the rules around QR codes by displaying posters and speaking to customers directly.

When someone enters a venue and scans an official NHS QR code poster using their smartphone, the venue information will be logged on the user's app. Users will then get an alert anonymously with advice on what to do based on the level of risk if they have been in contact with someone showing COVID-19 symptoms.

Information on how businesses can create a QR code poster for their building: <https://www.covid19.nhs.uk/pdf/businesses-qr-guide.pdf>

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**Date:** 23 September