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NZ explores new technologies to enhance contact tracing

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The Ministry of Health is trialing wearable devices at the border to help detect COVID-19



New Zealand's new COVID-19 tracing app, Elarm can monitor activity such as heart rate and exercise recovery rates from the connected wearable device. The app uses AI technology to inform users of early physiological changes detected through their wearable, which may indicate they are becoming unwell several days before they experience symptoms.

Up to 500 border workers can volunteer to participate in the trial, which will run until early May.

After installing the app on a smart device, they will receive regular notifications and alerts during the day and can view their own health information on the app.

The app establishes a personalised health baseline for each user based on their wearable data history, all data used by the app is private to the individual participants.

“Contact tracing is at the heart of our COVID-19 response, and it’s essential we find and treat people who might have been exposed to this difficult virus before it has a chance to take hold in our communities. We already have good tools such as the NZ COVID Tracer app and QR code posters, and the Ministry of Health is investigating other technologies that might provide further support for our contact tracing” says the Ministry of Health’s Shayne Hunter.

“If the Elarm app lives up to its potential, it might provide early notification to our critical border workforce if they’re becoming unwell. That means they can take appropriate action such as self-isolating and being tested for COVID-19.

New Zealand based company Datamine, developers of the Elarm app, will provide wearable devices for any of the border workers taking part who do not already have a wearable device. Fitbit will also provide a number of devices to border control workers in Auckland.