

WHO and ECDC launch indicator framework to evaluate the public health effectiveness of digital proximity tracing solutions



Countries have readily employed innovative technologies throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to support the implementation of public health and social measures. Digital proximity tracing—using smartphones or purpose-built devices to capture anonymized interactions between individuals then issuing alerts—emerged during the pandemic as a new means of support to government-led programmes for contact tracing.

ECDC and WHO developed this indicator framework in consultation with public health experts globally. The framework will provide countries with a standardized approach for evaluating their use of digital proximity tracing solutions. It will also assess the extent to which these solutions have aided national contact tracing strategies for COVID-19.

“This new indicator framework has been developed through a strong collaboration between ECDC and WHO. It offers countries a standardized approach to gather the evidence and assess the contribution that digital proximity tracing technology has made to large-scale contact tracing efforts for COVID-19. We anticipate that it will become an invaluable tool,”

said Dr Natasha Azzopardi-Muscat, Director of the Division of Country Health Policies and Systems at WHO/Europe.

“Digital proximity tracing technology is a new tool for a new challenge – COVID-19. It is vital that we evaluate its public health effectiveness in order to understand how best to use this technology right now as well as for future pandemics,”

said Vicky Lefevre, Head of Unit for Public Health Functions at the ECDC.

“This indicator framework provides a concrete approach for countries to gather and evaluate evidence on the use and performance of national digital proximity tracing solutions. This knowledge will be vital in our understanding of the public health impact that such approaches have had during the COVID-19 pandemic and their potential to be applied in mitigating future public health threats”

said Soumya Swaminathan, Chief Scientist, World Health Organization.

The framework proposes a list of indicators to assist public health authorities in measuring:

- the extent to which digital proximity tracing solutions have been used;
- the extent to which they have been successful in detecting contacts at risk of infection;
- the speed at which digital proximity tracing approaches can notify potential contacts, when compared to conventional contact tracing; and
- enablers and barriers to their usage.