

Written evidence submitted by Everbridge (C190019)

[Everbridge](#) is the world leading critical event management company and provider of emergency communications systems, founded after the 9/11 attacks. Our technologies are used around the world by 3,700 public authorities at city, region, state and national level, and by more than 5,000 businesses. Right now, the authorities in [Norway](#), [Iceland](#), [Sweden](#), the [Netherlands](#) and [Australia](#) amongst others are utilising our [Public Warning Systems](#) technology as part of their Covid-19 strategies.

Concerns over virus tracker apps as the only solution to tackling Covid-19

The UK Government is currently testing the NHSX app designed to contact trace citizens fight Covid-19 and ease the current lockdown.

Unlike most comparable countries, it uses a centralised data system and does not adopt an Apple-Google initiative – sparking mounting concerns about privacy and technical capability.

The UK Government must consider that there are alternative systems which complement the app approach, meaning no citizen will be left behind.

There are several serious challenges, to which our technology is complementary, to the app which are worth considering:

- **User uptake:** To be effective at least 60-80 per cent of people need to install the app. Estimates vary, but even seemingly ubiquitous apps such as WhatsApp are not thought to be used by more than 70 per cent of the population. It is unlikely to reach the whole population and we need a solution that ensures the biggest reach possible.
- **Vulnerable and elderly people are left out:** According to Ofcom only 40 per cent of over 65s own a smartphone. Why aren't we leveraging the technology most people already own, including the elderly i.e. standard mobile phones?
- **Data reliability:** The app relies on citizens inputting the correct information and filling out forms with many data points. There is risk of error here which could lead to wrong decisions and wrong advice being given.
- **Human impact:** The app provides you with a push notification once it has the right information. What is the next step and how will the app ensure citizens follow through with a test? How can someone communicate with authorities if they need help or advice?
- **Privacy:** The app relies on the centralised collection of personal and sensitive health information, which brings with it risks.
- **Technology:** New apps need frequent updates; each change is a challenge to uptake and relies on the individual to update their phone.

The UK Government must consider solutions which reach the entire population during this critical time

- Everbridge technologies have a range of products available to help tackle Covid-19 – the Public Warning System, Critical Events Management and Previstar platforms.
- Public alerts are based on text messages and use the SIM card information already held by mobile phone carrier networks to make two-way contact with devices.
- Because standard mobile phones are almost ubiquitous, using text alerts means equality of information. Everyone gets the right message, in the right place, at the right time, all overseen by the authorities by way of a continuous campaign.
- When combined with centrally collated testing data, the system would allow the Government to text every phone in identified virus ‘hotspot’ area and instruct people to access testing.
- Crucially, contacts are made on the basis of SIM information already logged with mobile masts – the phone number and the specific masts the phone has been connected to.
- Our system also allows you to detect the exact language of a SIM card and communicate with citizens in that person’s language, meaning that foreign nationals and non-native speakers can be assured of getting the right information.
- All mobile phones can receive text messages. Nobody needs to sign up to an app and nobody needs to share personal data to receive crucial public health information.
- No personal identifiable information (PPI) is ever stored or used by Everbridge.

The NHSX virus tracker app is not a silver bullet to tackle Covid-19 and must sit as part of a wider holistic strategy to communicate directly with citizens.

We cannot rely on purely news media, public information campaigns or social media to get authoritative information directly to citizens to help them protect themselves and stay safe.

There are serious challenges around protecting personal data and ensuring those who most need protection can access and easily use any system.

Some of these problems can be resolved using a two-way text message system, ensuring people who can’t or won’t use apps can still be told when they have been in a virus hotspot and how to access contact tracing and testing.

The UK Government must think through the next step once a positive or negative test has been established and the citizen has been informed – what information should that person receive next and what action should they take?

Our technology is already in use around the world – by 3,700 public bodies and more than 5,000 firms.

It is worth noting that under an EU Communications Directive, all EU states must have a public warnings system in place by 2022, but many do not have one in place yet, including the UK.

Our philosophy is that no one should be left behind. The UK Government has just one chance to get this right to help us fight Covid-19 – it must be right first time.

(6 May 2020)