

Facebook aims its Messenger at coronavirus battle

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Facebook on Monday began enlisting outside developers to create ways its Messenger service can help health organizations battling the novel coronavirus.

The social network also invited software savants to take part in an online "hackathon" aimed at creating ways to use Messenger to ease social-distancing and deliver accurate information about the pandemic, according to Messenger vice president Stan Chudnovsky in a blog post.

He unveiled a global program intended to connect government [health organizations](#) and UN agencies with developers who can create ways to use Messenger share [accurate information](#) and speed up responses to people's questions.

Software makers, for example, could help agencies automate answering common questions, to allow staff to tackle more challenging tasks.

Developers can also help organizations use software to quickly distribute updated information.

UNICEF and Pakistan's Ministry of National Health already use Messenger to keep people posted about COVID-19, according to the Facebook-owned messaging platform.

Facebook-owned messaging service WhatsApp recently launched a free World Health Organization alert designed to answer questions about the coronavirus and debunk "coronavirus myths."

The service, launching in English, is to expand in coming weeks to

include Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish.

WhatsApp last week launched a Coronavirus Information Hub in partnership with WHO and United Nations organizations.

WhatsApp, which claims more than a billion users, issued a \$1 million grant to an International Fact Checking Network alliance devoted to reporting on coronavirus rumors spreading on messaging services.

"We think the most important step WhatsApp can take is to help connect people directly with public health officials providing crucial updates about coronavirus," spokesman Carl Woog told AFP.

Concerns have been raised about WhatsApp and other messaging services being used to spread bogus information about coronavirus.

WhatsApp software prevents users from blasting messages to massive numbers of people at once, which tends to be a spam tactic.

The [service](#) also labels forwarded or chain messages to show people they did not come directly from a friend or family member.

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