

Google publishes movement data to bolster war against coronavirus

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Google on Friday disclosed it is publishing the information it harvests from smartphones to help inform government officials how people's movements are changing in response to the coronavirus outbreak.

The search giant said it has started to provide aggregated information about people's visits to stores, groceries, pharmacies, recreation sites, parks, transit stations, workplaces and homes for an array of locations, including movement trends in the United States and California overall, as well as in individual counties.

"Starting today we're publishing an early release of our COVID-19 Community Mobility Reports to provide insights into what has changed in response to work from home, shelter in place, and other policies aimed at flattening the curve of this pandemic," Google stated in a blog post on Friday.

Google's mobility report revealed that travelers in the Greater Bay Area's five counties—Santa Clara County, Alameda County, Contra Costa County, San Mateo County, and San Francisco—have all increased their visits to residences to a greater degree than is the case in either the United States or California, according to this news organization's review of the Google information.

People in the Bay Area also have slashed their visits to workplaces, restaurants, and recreation sites to a much greater degree than people in California or the United States.

"The reports use aggregated, anonymized data to chart movement trends over time by geography, across different high-level categories of places," Google stated in the blog post.

With one exception—visits to parks—people in the five counties of the Greater Bay reduced their visits to non-residential locations compared with what happened in California overall, the analysis of the Google statistics shows. The changes in travel patterns were measured against a baseline that Google had previously established.

Plus, people in the Greater Bay Area are visiting residential locations to a much greater extent than is the case in Southern California, California, and the United States. That could indicate that people are engaging in sheltering efforts to a heightened degree in the Bay Area, the Google information reveals. This news organization included Southern California's Los Angeles County, Orange County, San Diego County, Riverside County, and San Bernardino County.

Residential sites: Those visits increased by 17.8% in the Greater Bay Area, 15.4% in Southern California, 15% in California, and 12% in the United States, Google reported. Residential visits increased by 21% in San Francisco, 19% in San Mateo County, 17% in Alameda County and Santa Clara County, and by 15% in Contra Costa County.

Retail and recreational sites: Those visits were slashed by 60.6% in the Greater Bay Area, 48.2% in Southern California, 50% in California, and 47% in the United States. San Francisco travelers reduced visits to these locations by 75% and Santa Clara County travelers cut those trips by 62 percent.

Grocery and pharmacy sites: Those visits decreased by 28.8% in the Greater Bay Area, 24% in both Southern California and California, and 22% in the United States, the Google data determined. San Francisco travelers chopped those visits by 37% and Santa Clara County travelers cut those trips by 33 percent.

Parks: Visits to parks slumped by 28.2% in the Greater Bay Area, 42% in Southern California, 38% in California, and 19% in the United States. Travelers chopped those visits by 55% in San Francisco and by 35% in San Mateo County.

Transit stations: Trips to transit stations fell 66.6% in the Greater Bay Area, 51.2% in Southern California, 54% in California, and 51% in the

United States. San Mateo County travelers slashed trips to transit stations by 83% in what could portend brutal consequences for Caltrain, while Santa Clara County travelers chopped transit visits by 71 percent.

Workplace sites: Visits to workplaces plunged 46.4% in the Greater Bay Area, 39.8% in Southern California, 39% in California, and 38% in the United States. San Francisco travelers cut workplace visits by 53 percent, while Santa Clara County travelers cut visits to workplaces by 48 percent.

Mountain View-based Google sought to mollify [privacy concerns](#) regarding the publication of the movements of smartphone users.

"These reports have been developed to be helpful while adhering to our stringent privacy protocols and policies," Google said in the blog post.

Still, some people offered concerns on Friday about the new Google endeavors. One person who raised a red flag about the situation was Rebecca Rivers, a former Google employee who was terminated after she protested certain practices of the search giant.

"Google has an unimaginable amount of location data on its users," Rivers said in a post on her Twitter account.

Rivers specifically warned that Google's tracking efforts could be used to infringe on a person's liberties and privacy.

"I've seen and worked with this location data and it could be used to 'snitch' on users and report them to the government for breaking quarantine/lockdown," Rivers said in a tweet on Friday.

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