

# Need for speed in COVID-19 digital contact tracing

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Australia's COVIDSafe app needs to be faster and have higher uptake rates to be effective as the nation's digital contact tracing solution, according to a working paper released by The University of

Queensland's Institute for Social Science Research.

Professor of Social Data and Analytics at the institute and Director of the Centre for Social Data Analytics at Auckland University of Technology Professor Rhema Vaithianathan led a team of trans-Tasman researchers in studying the efficacy of the COVIDSafe app and other digital contact tracing programs.

"Speed is the most important factor when identifying and isolating people who might have been exposed to COVID-19, rather than how comprehensively all those people are identified," Professor Vaithianathan said.

"Enhanced manual tracing apps like Australia's COVIDSafe are designed to supply manual contact tracers with the details of exposed people who could otherwise be missed, but because those apps don't support automated notifications, they just can't inject enough speed in the process to improve transmission control.

"Since speed is the most crucial element for controlling the spread of COVID-19, it is unlikely that enhanced manual tracing solutions such as COVIDSafe can do much to reduce reproduction rates."

The researchers recommended the use of contact tracing solutions that offer instantaneous notifications, which can then be followed up by public health officers to ensure isolation has occurred.

People who came within close proximity of an infected person would be automatically notified once the infected person tested positive with public health authorities.

Professor Vaithianathan said digital solutions gained real value when they could take work from manual contact tracers, and this was possible

only at app take-up levels above 60 percent, suggesting that Australia's 40 percent target was simply too low.

"Given the need for high rates of uptake, building and maintaining social licence for the use of digital tools is critical," she said.

"Governments need to demonstrate that the value to the user is high and that privacy and [security risks](#) are low.

"We hope this paper offers useful information and guidance for policymakers who are required to make high stakes decisions about digital contact tracing options both in the context of COVID-19 and beyond."

**More information:** Digital Contact Tracing for COVID-19: A Primer for Policymakers: [issr.uq.edu.au/files/14448/PolicyPrimer.pdf](https://issr.uq.edu.au/files/14448/PolicyPrimer.pdf)

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