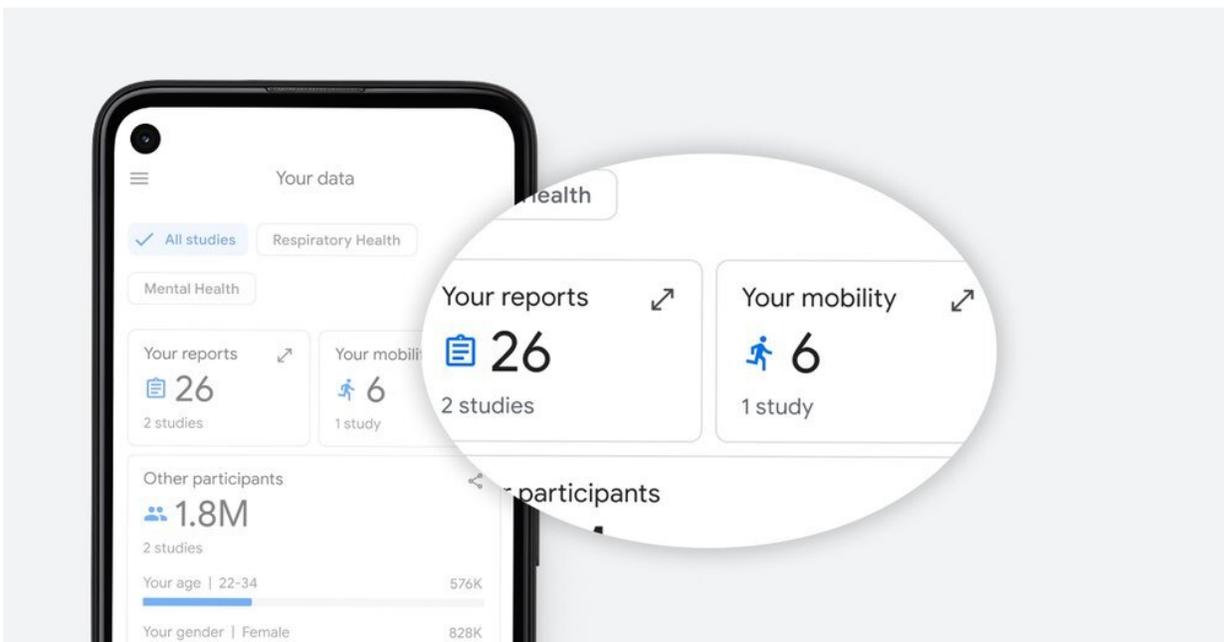


Google, Harvard unveil Android medical research app

December 11 2020, by Peter Grad



Credit: Google

Google has partnered with Harvard Medical School to launch an app that allows anyone with an Android phone to participate in medical studies.

The Google Health Studies app, available now, will train its sights first on respiratory illnesses such as COVID-19 and the common flu.

With this new app, participants can provide data either through response

to surveys or through sensory readings such as heart rate and temperature obtained through the phone.

The project is being joined by Boston Children's Hospital.

Dr. John Brownstein, Chief Innovation Officer of the Boston Children's Hospital and a professor at Harvard Medical School, emphasized the importance of such a potentially powerful tool in the effort to combat the epidemic.

"With COVID-19 emerging alongside seasonal respiratory pathogens, research is now needed more than ever to develop more effective treatments and mitigation strategies," Brownstein said. "Google Health Studies provides people with a secure and easy way to take part in [medical research](#), while letting researchers discover novel epidemiological insights into respiratory diseases."

Emphasis will be placed on privacy and security, Google stated in a blog post this week. The app uses an approach called federated learning and analytics, which means that rather than collecting massive amounts of data on a single server, the Google Health studies app will hold data in a decentralized system without sharing the data. This will help provide greater control over data privacy, security and access rights, ensuring participant anonymity.

Open to all adults, the program will examine data from participants as it tracks their movements within a community or as they travel.

Participants will routinely report how they feel, what [preventive measures](#) they may have taken and any medical exam test results.

Demographics data will be tapped as well, including age, gender and race of participants.

"Researchers in this study can examine trends to understand the link

between mobility (such as the number of daily trips a person makes outside the home) and the spread of COVID-19," the Google post said.

Apple initiated a similar project last year with its Research app. Those studies collected data on menstrual cycles, hearing and heart health. Apple provided a ResearchKit program that allowed researchers to craft their own iPhone apps.

Brownstein noted that the Android project will tap into a population that is sometimes overlooked in studies, one that differs from the typical iPhone user. Observing that Android phone users tend to have lower median incomes than iPhone users, he said the Google Health Studies app opens a valuable avenue into new research.

"Android represents probably a more diverse dataset [than iPhone]. We're pretty excited about the ability to leverage that," he said.

Along with strict security measures, the new app allows participants to view all data they are providing. Google prohibits the sharing or sale of data to anyone.

Participants will be able to access research findings as studies are completed.

More information: blog.google/technology/health/...-health-studies-app/

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