North Dakota announces launch of Care19 Alert app to help reduce spread of COVID-19 as students return

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BISMARCK, N.D. – Gov. Doug Burgum today announced the launch of the new Care19 Alert smartphone app designed to notify users of possible COVID-19 exposure while protecting their privacy with technology developed by Apple and Google.

“Care19 Alert is a powerful tool in the fight against COVID-19 and another example of how we’re embracing technology and innovation to save lives and livelihoods,” Burgum said. “North Dakota was the first state to launch a contact tracing app, and now we’re the first state to connect an exposure notification system with the National Key Server, which will allow Care19 Alert to work with similar apps in other states. This makes Care19 Alert a vital resource in keeping schools and businesses open while protecting personal privacy.”

North Dakota-based ProudCrowd LLC developed Care19 Alert in partnership with the North Dakota Department of Health using federal funding. The free app is available to download through the App Store and the Google Play Store. Care19 Alert is the only app in North Dakota allowed to use the exposure notification system (ENS) application programming interface (API) jointly created by Apple and Google.

“As COVID-19 cases continue to be identified across our state, it is important for people to know whether they have been exposed to someone who has tested positive for the virus,” interim State Health Officer Dr. Andrew Stahl said. “The more North Dakotans use Care 19 Alert, the greater the likelihood that they will receive timely exposure notifications that lead to effective disease prevention.”

The launch of Care19 Alert comes at a critical time as the school year begins and in-person classes resume for North Dakota students. Maintaining a healthy environment for staff and students through efficient contact tracing and exposure notification is essential in ensuring all students have the opportunity to learn and succeed.

By using Care19 Alert in conjunction with the original Care19 app, now called Care19 Diary, residents can maximize the number of people who can be notified of exposure. Both apps maintain users' privacy and work seamlessly to reduce the spread of COVID-19 by providing timely notifications to a broad range of users in an efficient and secure manner.

"For those heading off to college in the coming weeks, the app can be customized to a student's college or university so that specific campus information can be quickly provided to the student," North Dakota University System Chancellor Mark Hagerott said. "The North Dakota University System is committed to providing a safe learning environment, and we encourage everyone to utilize the tools our state has in place to mitigate the spread of COVID-19."

Care19 Alert uses Bluetooth proximity technology provided by both Apple and Google notification systems. The app provides proactive alerts and notifications to users based on anonymous keys exchanged between smartphones as users go about their daily activities. Click the following link for more info on the technology: www.google.com/covid19/exposurenotifications/.

Care19 Alert users will be notified if their device was in proximity of another device whose user tests positive for COVID-19. The app updates daily with positive COVID-19 results submitted by other users, which are then checked against the list of random keys that each device has encountered for more than 15 minutes in the last 14 days.

People who use Care19 Alert must explicitly choose to turn on exposure notifications, and they can turn off the app at any time. The Apple-Google Notification System utilized by the app does not collect, use or store any device location, including for users who report positive results. Users have the option to decide whether to report a positive COVID-19 diagnosis, and identities are not known to Apple, Google or other app users. The system is only used for exposure notifications by official public health authorities and is not monetized.

Care19 Alert is the first exposure notification app to connect with the National Key Server provided by the Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL). Use of this server allows different states' apps to communicate with each other, protecting North Dakotans when they are traveling across state borders or when others are visiting North Dakota and subsequently become COVID-19 positive.

Those who already have Care19 Diary will still need to download Care19 Alert to use the exposure notification system; the existing app will not update automatically to incorporate the new technology.

More information about Care19 Alert and Care19 Diary can be found at https://belegendary.link/Care19.

For more information on North Dakota's COVID-19 response, visit www.health.nd.gov/coronavirus or www.ndresponse.gov.

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