HAWAI'I STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH LAUNCHES ALOHASAFE ALERT APP TO REDUCE SPREAD OF COVID-19

Posted on Jan 6, 2021 in Newsroom

Free app augments contact tracing, keeps data private, sends notice of potential exposure

HONOLULU — The Hawai'i State Department of Health (DOH) in partnership with aio Digital and the Hawai'i Executive Collaborative (HEC) have launched AlohaSafe Alert, the free State of Hawai'i officially-approved exposure notification app to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

"Masks, distance and vaccines are all valuable tools against COVID-19. The AlohaSafe Alert app is another important tool in the fight against COVID-19," said Dr. Libby Char, director of the Hawai'i State Department of Health. "This innovative app was developed for the community, by the community, and it has the potential to greatly increase the speed of the exposure notification process, allowing anyone who receives an alert to quickly self-quarantine and get tested if needed."

"AlohaSafe Alert will help to empower our residents to protect themselves, their families, and their community," said Governor David Ige. "We appreciate the partnership formed between DOH and the private sector to develop this useful tool and help Hawai'i remain one of the states with the lowest infection rates in the country. I strongly urge everyone to download this free app so they can receive notifications as quickly as possible in the event of an exposure."

AlohaSafe Alert was first piloted on Lāna'i and in Hāna on November 17, and expanded to Maui County on December 16. The app has been downloaded more than 14,000 times.

"When Lāna'i experienced a surge in COVID cases, AlohaSafe Alert was critical in helping us to control the spread," said Mayor Michael Victorino of Maui County. "Maui County strongly believes these types of technological advances can help us get the upper hand in the fight against COVID-19. We were pleased to pilot the app in our county, and hope other communities throughout the state utilize this tool to protect all of our residents."

Hawai'i joins 17 other states and 19 countries in authorizing the Google/Apple Exposure Notification (GAEN) system that uses Bluetooth technology to measure the closeness and duration of signals between enrolled smartphones. AlohaSafe Alert will anonymously and privately

send notifications within 48 hours if an app user comes into close contact – within six feet for at least 15 minutes – with an individual who tested positive for the virus in the past 14 days.

“We have confidence that this tool will help to make our communities safer,” said Brandon Kurisu, president of aio Digital and founder of AlohaSafe Alert. “The GAEN technology is anonymous and completely private, and most important, is connected to a national server that can help to protect Hawai‘i residents as we welcome visitors to the islands and open up our economy.”

Preliminary results and learnings from other states and countries show that, coupled with other measures, if only 15 percent of the population were to use AlohaSafe Alert, COVID-19 infections could be reduced by eight percent and deaths by six percent.

“The effectiveness of AlohaSafe Alert is dependent on our residents downloading the app and we urge our community to seize this opportunity to further protect each other,” said Representative Linda Ichiyama, chair of the House Committee on Pandemic and Disaster Preparedness. “The legislature sees this app as a critical tool our state can deploy to proactively help us control the spread of COVID-19.”

“It’s our privilege to partner with the state, DOH, legislators, businesses, and community groups to encourage our residents to use AlohaSafe Alert,” said Lynelle Marble, executive director of Hawai‘i Executive. “Based on studies from the University of Oxford, for every two app users, one infection can be avoided. It will be up to each of us to add AlohaSafe Alert to our existing safety measures so we can further care for our families, neighbors, and community.”

Other key features of AlohaSafe Alert include:

- Participants may opt in/out at any time;
- The app allows smartphones to interact and exchange anonymous codes that are frequently changed, but it does not keep track of any geo-location or GPS data;
- Only DOH authorities will have access to data, and all data will be kept anonymous;
- Should you test positive for COVID-19, your identity is kept private from anyone who receives an alert, and their identities are kept private from you;
- AlohaSafe Alert is interoperable with other similar official notification apps in other states and those apps can also be used by visitors to Hawai‘i.

The app was developed by local firm aio Digital, was funded by DOH and The Omidyar Group, and supported by a public-private partnership with the Hawai‘i Executive Collaborative, Every1ne Hawai‘i and the State of Hawai‘i.

To download the free app, go to the Google Play or Apple App Store on your phone. For more information visit https://www.alohasafealert.org/.

# # #

PDF: Hawai‘i State Department of Health Launches AlohaSafe Alert App to Reduce Spread of COVID-19