

COVID-19: App to assist early detection of second wave

The National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) reckons CoughWatchSA would play a critical role in monitoring the spread of diseases, beyond COVID-19



by [Thabo Baloyi](#) 2020-10-28 in [News](#)



[This photograph taken on September 16, 2020 shows a research fellow from the School of Materials Science and Engineering at the Nanyang Technology University wearing a face mask installed with sensors which transmit via Bluetooth readings of a person's skin temperature, blood pressure, heart rate and blood oxygen levels to a mobile application in Singapore. - From monitoring vital signs, to filtering filthy air and even translating speech into myriad languages -- the coronavirus-fuelled boom in mask-wearing has spawned an unusual range of high-tech face coverings. \(Photo by Roslan RAHMAN / AFP\) / TO GO WITH Singapore-Japan-SKorea-health-virus-technology-mask, FOCUS by Catherine Lai and Harumi Ozawa](#)

As the country braces for a possible second wave of the coronavirus, [the National Institute for Communicable Diseases \(NICD\)](#) is expected to launch CoughWatchSA, a mobile application which will track early detection or the beginning of the influenza season.

“The aim of this platform is to identify and monitor acute respiratory tract infections (ARI) which may potentially include influenza, RSV and COVID19. South Africa may have reached its peak in the

cumulative number of cases, but there may be a potential for a second wave of infections,” said the NICD.

The application will allow users register and report their respiratory symptoms on a weekly basis. While the NCID is yet to give a specific time frame for the official unveiling, it says for now, the app will run as a pilot for the remainder of the year. It will be launched as a complementary surveillance platform to current disease surveillance systems.

The Minister of Health Dr Zweli Mkhize and other health authorities, including the World Health Organisation (WHO) had warned of a resurgence of COVID-19, however the main emphasis was on how the country should respond – countering the spread of the disease by applying the necessary health and safety measures.

APP CAN SPOT OUTBREAKS “FOR UP TO A WEEK OR TWO EARLIER” THAN TRADITIONAL COUNTERPARTS

CoughWatchSA is fundamentally a digital participatory surveillance platform that allows for the monitoring and tracking of diseases in the population through user-reporting of health information.

The NCID has made mention that the application is not exactly new to the scene and has been around for more than 10 years, with a successful run in Europe, Australia and North America.

“This platform is able to detect outbreaks for up to a week or two earlier than traditional surveillance platforms and has been shown to be a complementary disease surveillance platform to current facility-based disease surveillance,” - National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD)

“In lower to middle income settings, this platform has the potential to assist disease surveillance where testing capacity or access to medical resources is extremely limited. In addition, through user-reporting of health information, we may identify patterns in health-seeking behaviour which is often very limited in the current setting,”

The public health body has further said tracking and monitoring diseases plays an important role in the analysis and reporting on the burden of infections.