

SA's new app to aid early detection of Covid-19

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The National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) is set to launch CoughWatchSA - a mobile application aimed at detecting a second wave of infection or the beginning of the flu season.

CoughWatchSA is a digital surveillance platform that functions with the help of the public to monitor and track diseases in the population.

The app lets users report their respiratory symptoms on a weekly basis to track the recovery process.

So far, it has been used effectively in Europe, Australia and North America for more than ten years.

“The aim of this platform is to identify and monitor acute respiratory tract infections (ARI) which may potentially include influenza, RSV and Covid-19.

“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 app will officially launch as a complementary surveillance platform to current disease surveillance systems after running as a pilot for the rest of 2020.

“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.

“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,” said the NICD.

The tracking and monitoring of diseases plays an vital role in the analysis and reporting on the impact of diseases, to prompt public health action for the reduction of morbidity and mortality.

This also works to improve the health of the general population.

During an outbreak, collecting data on confirmed cases allows for the tracking and monitoring of the spread of the disease, and helps scientists identify who is at risk of severe illness and mortality. This data is then used to carry out strategies to lessen the impact of the spread and ultimately save lives.