

NHS Covid-19 app: interoperability with the Irish Government's app

In theory, it is possible for the NHS and Irish Covid-19 apps to be interoperable, but it is proving very difficult to find a technical solution.

The two apps use different data architecture, different protocols and different algorithms.

Irish: data stored on each user's phone, and matches are made on the handset.

NHS app: data is stored by the central authority.

It is difficult for the risk-scoring calculation to take place between the two apps. The app will not have access to all the information it needs, including data on the distance and duration of contact, and the individuals' Covid-19 status.

It is difficult to find a solution for the NHS app to access the information it needs when its data is held in a central location. (This also goes against the Irish Government's decision to use a decentralised app, and plays into privacy concerns.)

As a possible pragmatic solution, NHSX is looking into whether there would be any technical difficulty in phones running both apps.

It is worth noting that officials led meetings NHSX has been attending with DoH and the IG have been positive and useful, with very good relationships. To date, there has been no resolution on the interoperability of both the Irish Government and the UK Government's respective apps. The next meeting to further discuss this issue is scheduled for Friday 22 May.

The UK app is scheduled to be rolled out further, week commencing 25 May. The ROI app has been delayed and we are not sighted on a clear launch date. In the preliminary technical discussion, the Irish Government was clear that it's first interest is in delivering the app for use in Ireland; there was no suggestion that it could be delayed to accommodate interoperability with the UK app.