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## Scientist behind NHS Covid app begs people not to delete it despite 'pingdemic'

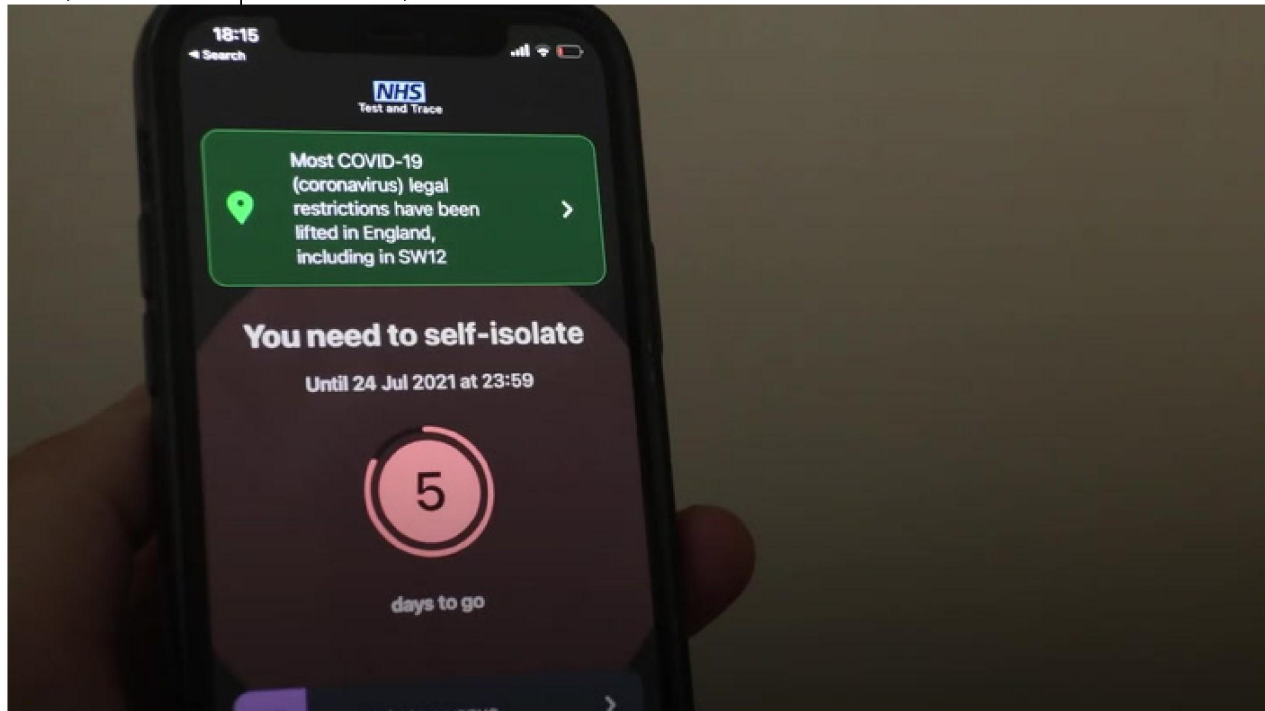
EXCLUSIVE: Professor Christophe Fraser said it would be unwise to delete the NHS Covid app, as he called on Boris Johnson to scrap the requirement to self-isolate after being pinged



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NEWS By [Martin Bagot](#) Health and Science Editor

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WHAT IS THE 'PINGDEMIC' AND DO PEOPLE PINGED BY THE COVID APP HAVE TO ISOLATE?

The scientist behind the NHS Covid app is urging people not to delete it from phones – but is calling on the Government to axe the requirement to self-isolate after being pinged.

Professor Christophe Fraser has waded into the argument over whether the double-jabbed should have to shut themselves away for 10 days.

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Writing for the Mirror, the chief scientific adviser for the app said: "A more useful approach [when] many people are vaccinated is... regular testing as an alternative to quarantine."

He added that the public should not delete the app because it is reducing hospitalisations.

*Are you using the NHS Covid app? Join the conversation in the comments section below.*

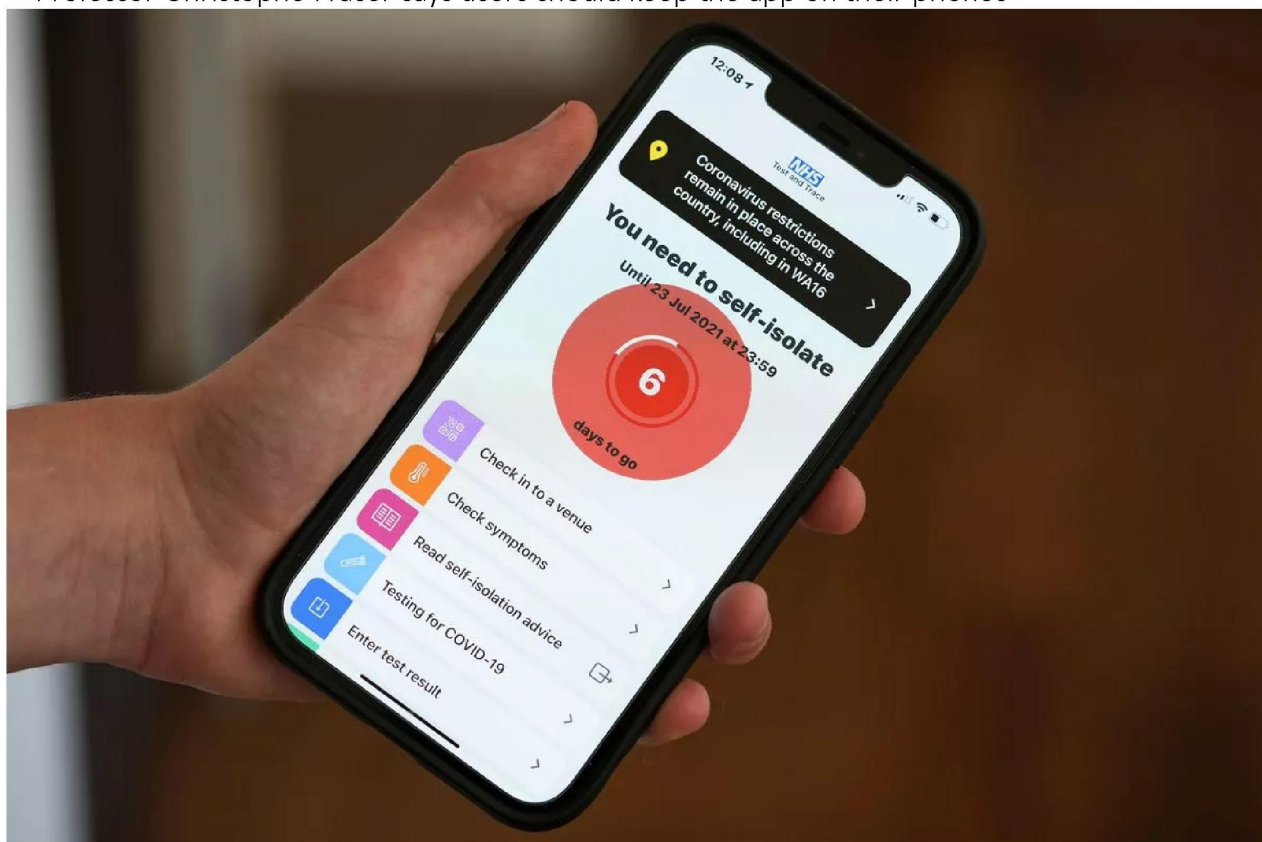
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Professor Christophe Fraser says users should keep the app on their phones



An alert or ping telling an NHS Covid app user to self-isolate (Image: Getty Images)

Up to 10 million people may have been forced to quarantine in recent weeks.

From August 16, those who have had both jabs will no longer have to self-isolate after being pinged.

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Ministers insisted Boris Johnson has no plans to bring forward the relaxation of isolation rules for the double-jabbed despite the pingdemic chaos.

Business chiefs have urged the Prime Minister to introduce the changes sooner to avert wider economic damage after shelves in some shops were stripped bare last week.

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***Find out how many cases of coronavirus there have been where you live in the widget above - and get an even more detailed breakdown when you click through to our sister site InYourArea..***

Meanwhile, the number of Met police officers off work has reached a record high with nearly one in five understood to be currently absent from duty.

Ministers will meet on Monday to discuss increasing the number of critical workers who can take daily tests instead of having to self-isolate.

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The Government is understood to be pushing to double the number of sites across England to 2,000 so more key staff, such as lorry drivers, can be included.

Bin collections are expected to be added to the exemptions list.

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Official figures on Sunday showed 29,173 new Covid cases and a further 28 deaths.

Infections have fallen over the past five days but scientists warn it is too early for the impact of Freedom Day on July 19 to be felt.

Thousands of people have taken advantage of the end of almost all Covid restrictions in England – packing out cafes, pubs and clubs. But more than one million people in Britain are isolating.

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Of those, 618,903 were pinged by the app in England and Wales in the week to July 14. It uses a check-in feature when users enter a public venue and can detect when they have been near someone who later tested positive.

### 'Software is an ally, it slows epidemic'

By Professor Christophe Fraser

I understand the frustration of people being pinged by the NHS Covid-19 app and told to isolate.

Like many people, I am enjoying more freedom and would be annoyed to now have to self-isolate.

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But deleting the app is not a good move. As one of the scientists who designed it, I can tell you that the app does work and is doing exactly what it is supposed to do.

Our research showed that over the winter period, use of the app helped reduce the size of the epidemic by roughly 14% to 24%.

And it is still working now, preventing new cases and hospitalisations every day.

The cause of increased app pings is increased cases of Covid-19. Our data shows that the numbers pinged by the app precisely tracks the number of cases.

App users consistently tell us that the main reason they use it is to protect their loved ones and their communities.

The app is entirely private and provides us with just enough data to check that it is working and improve it.

Tweaking the app to make it less sensitive in the face of the more infectious Delta virus is not the right move because the app slows the epidemic, resulting in fewer cases.

A more useful approach where many people are vaccinated is the use of regular testing as an alternative to quarantine.

It might not feel like it right now, but this app is your ally.

Deleting the app now might allow you to go away on holiday next week but if too many people choose to do that we could imperil future holidays for all of us.

A study published last week by Oxford University found daily testing would be just as effective as self-isolation for school children who have been in contact with a Covid case.

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Prof Fraser, a pathogen expert at the university, said the research suggests regular testing rather than quarantining would be effective.

YouGov polling last week showed one in five NHS Covid app users had turned off contact-tracing, and one in 10 had deleted it altogether. But Prof Fraser said it is unwise to do that because of the extra infections it could lead to.

If hospitals get close to being overwhelmed by Covid patients it could lead to restrictions returning.

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Thousands of revellers packed into Latitude festival in Southwold, Suffolk, on Sunday (Image: PA)

Home Office minister Kit Malthouse has suggested that exempting the double-jabbed from quarantine would not be brought forward from August 16.

He said: "We need to have the kind of natural firebreak of the start of the school holidays where people separate a little bit more before we get to August 16."

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But Confederation of British Industry director general Tony Danker said the move is needed immediately.

He added: "The Government said they were reopening the economy but the pingdemic is effectively closing it down. We should have a balanced plan. If you have been single-vaccinated or not vaccinated then you have to do a test and release to go to work."

Tory MP Jeremy Hunt last week warned the Government risks "losing social consent" for self-isolation if it does not immediately relax quarantine rules for the double-jabbed.

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The Government has refused to publish data on app usage amid the pingdemic, with much of the economy hit by staff absences.

Pub chain Greene King said 33 boozers were shut in a week because so many staff have had to self-isolate.

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