

India plans wristband patient surveillance as lockdown eases

April 22 2020, by Aniruddha Ghosal



An Indian policeman walks past an art work displayed on road urging people to stay home during lockdown to prevent the spread of new coronavirus in Hyderabad, India, Wednesday, April 22, 2020. India has reported nearly 20,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and over 600 deaths. (AP Photo/Mahesh Kumar A.)

India said Wednesday that it plans to manufacture thousands of

wristbands that will monitor the locations and temperatures of coronavirus patients and help perform contact tracing.

The [wristband](#) project aims to track quarantined patients and aid health workers and those delivering essential services. India is ramping up surveillance as it begins to ease one of the world's strictest virus lockdowns.

It has 19,984 confirmed cases of [coronavirus](#), including 640 deaths, and experts fear the epidemic's peak could still be weeks away. Thousands of wristbands are expected to be deployed, but an exact figure has not been released.

The wristbands mirror a similar program in Hong Kong, where authorities used bands to monitor overseas travelers ordered to self-isolate.

Broadcast Engineering Consultants India, a government-owned company, will present wristband designs to hospitals and state governments next week and work with Indian start-ups to manufacture them.

George Kuruvilla, the company's chairman, said the wristbands are likely to be rolled out in May.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has urged the country's 1.3 billion people to download a government contact-tracing app called Arogya Setu to help determine their infection risk. It has been downloaded over 50 million times since it was launched on April 2.

Kuruvilla said the wristbands could integrate data captured in the app.

He said the wristbands will be used to monitor the movements of

quarantined patients, both at home and at hospitals, and any spikes in their body temperature. They will send an alert to [public health officials](#) if patients move outside their quarantine zone. The devices will also have an emergency button that wearers can use to call for help.

The wristband will let health workers know if people they encounter have been to high-risk areas or have been in contact with an infected person, while aiding those delivering essential services such as groceries or medicines.

It will capture all the places an infected person has visited, the routes they took, determine if they had any foreign travel and identify those who were in their vicinity. It will also tell people if a [sick person](#) is nearby.

It will also help in creating a geofence, or a virtual perimeter, around areas being monitored, such as common meeting places, public transit or places for religious gatherings. A person leaving or entering the virtual perimeter could be alerted through the wristband.

The monitoring has raised [privacy concerns](#).

Dr. Anant Bhan, a public health and bioethics expert, said it is "important to factor in privacy protections and data protections" for both apps and wristbands.

"It is also important to ensure that where possible, consent is sought for the use of location tracking and sharing. Such initiatives could be useful for public health and surveillance purposes, but should not be used to stigmatize individuals or communities," he said.

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