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Border workers trialling wearable Covid-19 detection technology Elarm

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Border workers will spend the next month testing wearable technology that can detect whether they might have Covid-19 before the user experiences symptoms.



A security guard and soldier guarding an entrance to the M-Social Hotel, which is being used as a managed isolation facility, in Auckland. Photo: Supplied/ NZDF

Up to 500 volunteers will be involved in trialling the Elarm smartphone app - and the Ministry of Health hopes it will give border workers peace of mind as they work on the frontline.

Paul O'Connor is the founder of the Auckland technology firm Datamine, the app's developer, and told *Morning Report* the trial started today.

"Border workers will be able to sign up to that. About 150 of them who currently don't have wearable devices will get sent devices.

"We build a baseline for their physiological symptoms. So heartrate, heartrate recover, sleep recover and we then detect any changes in those symptoms similar to Covid-19 positive people that have had viral loads.

"We're able to go 'look, your body is not quite right and is indicating symptoms like Covid-19'.

The app was another layer of defence against the coronavirus, like mask wearing, handwashing, using the tracer app, the vaccine, and testing, O'Connor said.

"It allows people to detect if they have Covid-19 two to three days before they start getting symptoms. So this will enable people to get a test and just check whether they do have Covid-19 or not.

"We've been running this system since June last year, so we've got hundreds of thousands of different model runs and we're able to understand what the prevalence is, and the level of false positives of this are very low in terms of when someone is not sick.

"They may have the flu and we definitely pick that up because it's got a similar viral footprint ... and you will get an indication that look you are sick, but what it enables people to do is protect themselves."

Personal data on the app was private and not accessible for anyone else.