

Covid 19 coronavirus: Ministry of Health won't use Covid contact tracing cards

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A Covid-19 Bluetooth contact tracing card trialled in Ngongotahā last year will not be rolled out nationally. Photo / File



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Bluetooth contact tracing cards trialled in Rotorua last year won't roll out nationally, despite the Ministry of Health acknowledging existing gaps in the contact tracing system.

The decision to not adopt Bluetooth contact tracing cards trialled in Ngongotahā last year was announced at a community meeting last night.

Director-General of Health Ashley Bloomfield zoomed into the hui.

More than 1100 Ngongotahā residents aged over 19 volunteered for the week-long trial in November.

"It's wonderful that you all came together to help us with this trial," Bloomfield told the attendees of the hui at Waiteti Marae on Thursday night.

"It's amazing what can happen when people come together and act in each other's interests."

But Bloomfield said the Government did not use everything it tested.

"The decision was taken not to proceed with the Covid card rollout."

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Ministry of Health deputy director-general Shayne Hunter attended Thursday's hui in person.

Hunter acknowledged there were still gaps in the contact tracing system.

"We still don't have a solution for people who don't have the technology [to use the Covid app]."

Hunter said he had been surprised by the number of people who signed up for the trial.

Hunter said the cards would not be effective unless either everyone wore one or they could communicate with other devices such as mobile phones.

"The biggest issue for us is the card itself can't talk to another device."

Hunter said privacy issues and the cost of rolling out the card to everyone in the country were also factors.

"Some of the technologies we can use today do track where you go," Hunter said.

"New Zealanders wanted something that was fundamentally private and that limited the technology options."

Hunter said there were also some people who had mobile phones but don't have the data plans needed to use the Covid app effectively.

However, Hunter said fighting Covid-19 was about the approach, not the technology.

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"The focus is moving on to getting everybody vaccinated. That's the primary focus now."

Waiteti Marae chairman Guy Ngātai expressed frustration with the result.

"It's a shame we're not moving forward with the card as it's been a major player for the community," Ngātai said at the hui on Thursday.

Ngātai said a lot of people had committed a lot of time to the trial and "put their reputations out there" to make it succeed.

Ngātai wanted to know why the cards weren't being rolled out and if there were other solutions on the horizon that would be "user-friendly for everybody".

Despite only appearing on screen for a few minutes of the hui, Bloomfield also emphasised the need for vaccination.

"I wouldn't be doing my job if I wasn't encouraging you all, if you haven't already, to get vaccinated."

The hui was attended by about 40 people including Rotorua mayor Steve Chadwick and Te Arawa Covid Response Hub kaumātua Monty Morrison.

The Ministry of Health has been asked how much the trial cost to run.