The following is a selection of global COVID-19 developments compiled by the Thomson Reuters Data Privacy news team. This news bulletin covers technology developments, cybersecurity, proposed legislation, and other key data privacy updates relating to COVID-19.

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Technology Developments

**Chinese AI System Detects COVID-19 Infection in Chest CT Images** Hong Kong (April 22, 2021)

A multidisciplinary research team from The Chinese University of Hong Kong has developed an artificial intelligence (AI) system for the automated, rapid, and accurate detection of COVID-19 infections in chest computed tomography images. Using new federated learning techniques, the AI system is trained on multicenter data in Hong Kong without the need to centralize data in one place, thus protecting patient privacy.

**Facial Authentication for Vaccination Not The Same as Facial Recognition: Nandan Nilekani** India (April 20, 2021)

Aadhaar-based facial authentication used for vaccination drive is not the same as facial recognition, Nandan Nilekani said during Microsoft India's ExpertSpeak event. Nilekani is the former chairman of the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) and currently non-executive chairman of Infosys Ltd. The Indian government began rolling out an Aadhaar-based facial recognition system for COVID-19 vaccinations earlier this month after piloting the same. The pilot was conducted in Jharkhand where over 1000 successful authentications were carried out on a daily basis at the vaccination sites. Following public backlash due to privacy and exclusion concerns, it was clarified that this system is only a proof-of-concept and will not be mandatory. This system involves face authentication and not facial recognition.

Cybersecurity

**Facial Authentication for Vaccination Not the Same as Facial Recognition** India (April 20, 2021)

The Indian government began rolling out an Aadhaar-based facial recognition system for COVID-19 vaccinations. The pilot was conducted in Jharkhand where over 1000 successful authentications were carried out on daily basis at the vaccination sites. This initiative was set up to make the entire vaccination process "touchless".

As individuals receive the vaccine, states have been collecting personal health data in individual immunization registries. Experts say this data collection is essential to effectively monitor vaccination progress, report adverse reactions, compare vaccine efficacy in cross sections of the population, and keep track of who needs second doses and when.

Apple and Google Block NHS COVID-19 App Update Over Privacy Issues United Kingdom (April 13, 2021)

The new version of the app was supposed to be made available on the App Store and Google Play Store simultaneously, as lockdown rules ease nationwide ahead of the complete removal of restrictions on June 21, 2021. It was planned to automate the process further, by asking people to share their logs of venue check-ins if they tested positive. The data could have been used to alert other users.

Proposed Legislation

Congressman Cohen Reintroduces TSA Second Screening Act U.S. (April 15, 2021)

Congressman Steve Cohen (TN-09), a senior member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure and Judiciary Committees, has reintroduced the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) Second Screening Act. The bill would permit passengers being screened at TSA checkpoints to opt for a second electronic screening, rather than an automatic physical pat-down, when they believe they have produced a false positive result because of inadvertent movement or mistakenly having a foreign object in a pocket.

The Proposal for a Digital Green Certificate in the Joint Opinion of the EDPB and the EDPS European Union (April 15, 2021)

The Proposal for a Digital Green Certificate aims to facilitate the exercise of the right to free movement within the EU during the COVID-19 pandemic by establishing a common framework for the issuance, verification, and acceptance of interoperable certificates on COVID-19 vaccination, testing and recovery.

Other Key Data Privacy Updates


As Floridians signed up for texts of their COVID-19 test results or frantically created pharmacy accounts to find a vaccine, they gave away their phone numbers and unwittingly contributed to a growing problem, spam calls. The companies providing COVID-19 testing and vaccines may have shared recipients’ cell phone numbers and other limited personal information with third parties and subcontractors for marketing purposes, all with the patient's consent.

As Cases Rise, So Should Awareness Thailand (April 15, 2021)

Efforts at controlling the spread of COVID-19 in Thailand are underway with contact tracing, health surveillance, compulsory quarantining, and lockdowns, and of course, remedial efforts through vaccinations are progressing, albeit sluggishly. Most of these measures are likely to involve the extensive collection and use of personal data, medical and non-medical. However, little has been discussed about the need to protect personal data collected and used during the pandemic or the rights to data privacy of individual citizens, for that matter.

27 ambassadors have given the go-ahead on the Council's position in the upcoming negotiations with the European Parliament on the Digital green certificates, a tool conceived by the European Commission to ease travel restrictions in the summer season despite the pandemic. In the approved mandate to start talks with EU lawmakers, member states aim at retaining the possibility to process personal data collected even for non-travel purposes. The green certificates are expected to provide evidence that people have been vaccinated, tested negative or recovered from COVID-19, enabling them to travel freely within the EU while staying safe.

**How Safe is Your Data When You Book a COVID-19 Vaccine?** Australia (April 15, 2021)

The Australian government has appointed the commercial company HealthEngine to establish a national booking system for COVID-19 vaccinations. Selected through a Department of Health limited select tender process, the platform is being used by vaccine providers who don't have their own booking system. However, HealthEngine has a track record of mishandling confidential patient information. This article analyses those previous problems as well as discussing what safeguards are in place to regulate how patient data is handled.

**Businesses Adapt Tracing** New Zealand (April 14, 2021)

Privacy concerns have prompted a contact tracing switch. More businesses are turning to alternative contact tracing methods to protect customers' privacy such as replacing contact tracing sign-in sheets with a sign-in box alternative. For this method people add their details to a small paper square and then drop them into a ballot box. This change comes after a warning from the Privacy Commission about "poor privacy practice" with contact tracing registers. The commission says registers need to be managed in ways that protect a person's details from being accessed and misused.

**Review 'Disproportionate and Unwarranted' Measures** Cambodia (April 14, 2021)

United Nations independent human rights experts have called for a review of the new legal and administrative measures adopted by the Government of Cambodia in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which they said appear to be disproportionate and unwarranted. The new law could subject violators to prison for up to 20 years and fine them up to 20 million riels ($5,000). It also grants the Government power to ban or restrict any gathering or demonstration. Experts have stressed that restrictions on fundamental freedoms on public health grounds "must not breach rights and freedoms guaranteed by international human rights law, and they must be proportionate, non-discriminatory, time-bound and purpose limited".


Apple and Google have blocked a scheduled update to the NHS COVID-19 contract tracing app, over location sharing issues. The NHS COVID-19 app, which aids contact tracing in England and Wales, uses the Exposure Notification API, which tracks interactions between users with their Bluetooth signals. The current version of the app alerts users if they spend 15 minutes or more within two meters of another user who subsequently tests positive for COVID-19. The new version of the app was planned to automate the process further, by asking people to share their logs of venue check-ins if they tested positive. The data could have been used to alert other users. However, Google and Apple explicitly ban this type of location tracking, over privacy concerns.

**The 'Slippery Slope' of Vaccine Certificates** U.K. (April 13, 2021)
The UK government has published a review on what Downing Street is calling a "Covid Status Certification" and what that could potentially consist of. The proposal is to integrate the certification into the existing NHS App which would allow people to demonstrate if they have been fully vaccinated, recently recovered from COVID-19 or recently tested negative. Prime Minister Boris Johnson has stopped short of calling the proposed scheme a 'vaccine passport'. There are fears that once such a solution is in place the government could potentially extend the reach of the certification scheme for other purposes well beyond the scope and timeline of the pandemic. Those fears would not be unfounded, considering the government wants to hold onto NHS test and trace data for 20 years.

Data Security, And The Right To Privacy India (April 10, 2021)

With over 150 million downloads, India's Aarogya Setu is the world's most downloaded COVID-19 contact tracing app. Within the first month of its launch, it helped identify approximately 600 COVID-19 hotspots around the country. However, a lack of robust data protection laws and checks on mass surveillance to safeguard privacy and individual autonomy makes Aarogya Setu vulnerable to misuse. It thus presents a case for instituting a comprehensive regulatory framework that governs privacy and its enforcement mechanisms.