COLUMBIA, Mo. (KMIZ)

Big technology companies like Apple and Google have rolled out new technology alerting users if they've possibly been exposed to COVID-19. The technology isn't available to everyone though, only some state's have opted in to this feature. Missouri has not.

In an email response from the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, Lisa Cox said this feature "will not be done at a state level but local or private entities can engage in the effort if they choose."

Here's how the feature works; once you opt-in to the system it will generate a random ID for your device. Your phone and the phones around you will work in the background to exchange the IDs via Bluetooth. Your phone will periodically check all the random IDs
associated with positive COVID-19 cases against it's own list. If there's a match, you will receive a notification.

Scott Clardy with the Columbia/Boone County Public Health and Human Service Department told ABC 17 News the county would not be opting in to this feature quite yet. One of the main concerns was user privacy.

"We felt as though people would consider that an extreme invasion into their privacy. Nonetheless, someone knowing where you're at all the time," Clardy said.

Clardy also said the feature would only work if people truly opt in for the service and if they go into a true quarantine. "It's a great effort but you still got to have the public health input."

University of Missouri professor, Prasad Calyam said even if the technology is good, having enough people to opt in to the feature is another thing to consider.

"If you don't have enough data, you cannot really make the right conclusion," Calyam said. "It could be used more as a guidance rather than a mandate."

Another factor Calyam said to consider when looking at this feature is false positive or false negative alerts.

"False alarms are very common. It's very common to have false positives and false negatives," Calyam said. "The fact that there is a chance of these false alarms is a very real possibility."

Clardy said due to that also being a possibility, the health department can't take that risk right now.

"This is all dependent on enough people participating and once people opt in, how many of them will go into a true quarantine?"

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