

20.11.30

2 Deputy G.J. Truscott of St. Brelade of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding Jersey Covid Alert App (OQ.354/2020):

Will the Minister provide the Assembly with an update on the performance of the Jersey COVID Alert app in terms of its impact on understanding and controlling the spread of COVID-19 in Jersey?

The Deputy of St. Ouen (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

The app is an important piece of a much bigger picture in the attempt to control the spread of COVID-19 in the Island. It provides the contact tracing team with another tool to identify direct contacts of confirmed positive cases. When a person receives a positive test result, they are interviewed by the contact tracing team and a significant portion of that interview is used to identify possible contacts within the days leading up to the time at which the positive case starts their isolation. However, those initial interviews are often challenging for the positive case due to the shock of being confirmed as having COVID-19. For this reason, it is common for these initial interviews to miss potential direct contact and it may take a number of phone calls to establish a more complete picture of interactions. So the app helpfully provides an almost instant identification of direct contacts that the positive case might have forgotten about or was not aware of. The fact that the app is built on the basis of anonymity means that the provision of specific metrics can be challenging. However, in the first 39 days of the app's use, 75 positive cases were provided with passcodes by the contact tracing team. The app identified that these 75 positive cases were in direct contact with at least 175 other people, of which some went on to test positive. Some of these direct contacts were also identified by other contact tracing processes, but some were not, proving the app's usefulness.

3.2.1 Deputy G.J. Truscott:

I want to thank the Minister for his answer and I do believe this is a positive news story. Yes, I know the app has cost the Jersey taxpayer £250,000, but reassuringly the app is playing an important part in helping prevent the spread of COVID in our community. I quickly popped on the official Jersey Tourism website this morning. The first banner was: "Your safety is our priority." There were a number of other boxes with links to official government websites, all giving very good advice and reassurance to prospective tourists. But, disappointingly, there was mention ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Are you coming to a question, Deputy?

Deputy G.J. Truscott:

Just coming up now. Like all things, communication is key. Is the Minister satisfied with the public awareness campaign or does he think more can be done to improve the uptake and usage of the COVID alert app on the Island?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I am always pleased to receive suggestions as to how we might better communicate and improve services. So I have taken a note of the Jersey Tourism website and we will get in touch with whoever keeps that website and ask for reference to the app to be included, and indeed notification to be given to all persons arriving at the ports.

3.2.2 Senator S.Y. Mézec:

I know that there are statistics on how many devices have downloaded the app. But are there any statistics available for how many people have uninstalled the app from their phone or taken equivalent efforts to make it inactive on their phone?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I am afraid I am not aware of whether there are those statistics but I will inquire and come back to the Senator.

3.2.3 Senator S.Y. Mézec:

I thank the Minister for his answer. Would he endeavour to do so as quickly as possible on the basis that the way I understand it, that it may be possible for people to deliberately deactivate the app on their device if they believe that they are coming up to an event, which they would want to avoid isolation for and not want to receive notifications. That would clearly be a very irresponsible thing to do. When he has the information that he said he will look into, would he think about any publicity that may be necessary to ensure that people are using the app responsibly in the run-up to Christmas?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I thank the Senator for that and I will look into those aspects of it.

3.2.4 Deputy G.J. Truscott:

I understand that the Jersey COVID alert app now works in most of the U.K. (United Kingdom). Could the Minister confirm if the N.H.S. (National Health Service) app works in Jersey and could the Minister also confirm if there is to be an updated version of the app that will work in Europe as well?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I understand that the interoperability of the apps within the British Isles is reciprocal, so the English app should work in Jersey. I am not aware of any proposals to have that interoperability with any other European countries.