



Fourth and final report on the operation and effectiveness of COVIDSafe and the National COVIDSafe Data Store

16 May 2022 to 16 August 2022

17 August to 16 February 2023

15 March 2023



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Minister's Foreword

I present this report on the operation and effectiveness of COVIDSafe and the National COVIDSafe Data Store (NCDS), to both Houses of Parliament as required under section 94ZA of the *Privacy Act 1988* (the Act). This report covers two reporting periods, the fourth period, from 16 May 2022 to 16 August 2022 during which time the COVIDSafe app was operational, and from 17 August 2022 to 16 February 2023 during which period the COVIDSafe app and NCDS were decommissioned.

From 26 April 2020 to 16 August 2022, over 7.9 million people registered to use the COVIDSafe app. During the fourth period when the COVIDSafe app was operational, 16,867 people registered for the COVIDSafe app (at 16 August 2022).

During the fourth operating reporting period, COVIDSafe was not used by State and Territory Public Health Officials (PHO) to assist in contact tracing for COVID-19.

On 16 August 2022, the Privacy (Public Health Contact Information) (End of the COVIDSafe data period) Determination came into force, ending the COVIDSafe data period.

My Department, as Data Store Administrator, has met all obligations under the Act and all COVID app data has been deleted.



Purpose of this Report

This report discusses the operation and effectiveness of COVIDSafe and the NCDS, for the period 16 May 2022 to 16 August 2022 and decommission phase of COVIDSafe from 17 August 2022 to 16 February 2023.

The report is delivered to Parliament by the Minister for Health and Aged Care in accordance with section 94ZA of the Act.

Operation of the COVIDSafe app and the National COVIDSafe Data Store

During the operating reporting period, State and Territory PHO's were no longer using COVIDSafe to assist with contact tracing. As COVIDSafe was no longer required to prevent or control the spread of COVID-19, I, the Health Minister, made a determination under section 94Y of the Act to end the COVIDSafe data period.

The Privacy (Public Health Contact Information) (End of the COVIDSafe data period) Determination 2022 was registered on 9 August 2022 and came into force on 16 August 2022.

Once the COVIDSafe data period ended, the Department of Health and Aged Care (the Department), as the Data Store Administrator, was responsible for ensuring all privacy obligations were met under section 94P of the Act. This included:

- not collecting any further COVIDSafe app data and making the COVIDSafe app unavailable to download
- deleting all COVIDSafe app data from the NCDS
- informing me, as Health Minister, and the Information Commissioner, that all COVIDSafe app data has been deleted from the NCDS, and
- taking all reasonable steps to inform COVIDSafe users in relation to communication devices that:
 - all COVIDSafe app data has been deleted from the NCDS
 - app data can no longer be collected, and
 - they should delete the COVIDSafe app from their personal devices.

Decommission of COVIDSafe

On 16 August, COVIDSafe app data was no longer collected and the COVIDSafe app was removed from Google and Apple app stores for download. Information was provided to users via SMS text and push notifications, as well as on Government websites; [COVIDSafe.gov.au](https://www.health.gov.au) and [health.gov.au](https://www.health.gov.au). This advised users that health officials were no longer using the COVIDSafe app to assist with contact tracing, users should uninstall COVIDSafe app from their device and all COVIDSafe data collected will be deleted.

The Department completed the deletion of COVID app data within seven weeks of the COVIDSafe data period ending.



Once all COVID app data had been deleted from the NCDS, the Department informed users via updates to information on both Government websites. The Department advised me, and the Information Commissioner, on 12 October 2022, that all COVID app data had been deleted from the NCDS.

The decommissioning process was completed using the Department's IT professionals. Funding to former IT providers ceased at the end of June 2022 and no external contract providers were utilised in the decommission phase of the project.

As specified by the Act, the legislation supporting COVIDSafe self-repealed 90 days following declaration of the end of the COVIDSafe data period. This occurred on 16 November 2022.

Effectiveness of the COVIDSafe app and the National COVIDSafe Data Store

Since the commencement of COVIDSafe to 16 August 2022, there have been:

- 792 uploads of data from the app.
- 1.654 million digital handshakes.
- 37,677 encounters; and
- 2,829 potential close contacts identified from those uploads.

During the period 16 May 2022 to 16 August 2022, no additional uploads of data from COVID positive cases were made to the NCDS and subsequently no additional handshakes, encounters or close contacts were identified. State and Territory PHO's did not access the Health Portal during the reporting period.

Privacy

The strong privacy controls for COVIDSafe were maintained throughout the program's lifespan. The Department's commitment to privacy of COVIDSafe data has continued through the decommission phase of the program by meeting its' privacy obligations for COVID app data under the Act.

The Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC), as the independent national regulator for privacy, undertook its' fifth and final assessment of COVIDSafe. The assessment reviewed the compliance of the Data Store Administrator's deletion and notification requirements under the Act relating to the end of COVID app data period.

The report was released on 30 November 2022 and concluded the Data Store Administrator had met all privacy obligations under the Act. The OAIC made two suggestions which the Department agreed and addressed prior to publication of the report.

The report is available on the OAIC's website.

Conclusion

During the reporting period, State and Territory PHOs were no longer using COVIDSafe to assist with contact tracing. As the COVIDSafe app was no longer required to prevent or control the spread of COVID-19, I made a determination to end the COVIDSafe data period.

The Department was found to comply with the strict privacy controls and met its' obligations under the Act to delete all COVID app data from the NCDS.



Attachments A - COVIDSafe app activity statistics

Reporting Period - Cumulative from 16 May 2022 to 16 August 2022

For the purposes of this report encounters are defined as interactions that are within 1.5 metres for 15 minutes or more. Encounters of 1 minute or more in duration are not included in this report.

	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT	TOTAL
Uploads by COVIDSafe users who tested positive to COVID-19	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Handshakes contained in the uploads	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Encounters contained in the uploads that are within 1.5 metres for 15 minutes or more	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unique potential close contacts generating the uploaded handshakes within 1.5 metres for 15 minutes or more	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Note: np - not published as these relate to a very small number of uploads.									



Reporting Period - Cumulative from 26 April 2020 to 16 August 2022

	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT	TOTAL
Uploads by COVIDSafe users who tested positive to COVID-19	125	661	np	np	np	np	np	np	792
Handshakes contained in the uploads	251,153	1,396,574	3,293	np	955	2,026	np	np	1,654,001
Encounters contained in the uploads that are within 1.5 metres for 15 minutes or more	10,792	26,414	190	np	170	111	np	np	37,677
Unique potential close contacts generating the uploaded handshakes within 1.5 metres for 15 minutes or more	1,041	1,733	34	np	12	9	np	np	2,829
Note: np - not published as these relate to a very small number of uploads.									

Key Definitions

Uploads: Number of unique people who have had their data uploaded to the NCDS.

Handshake: A single Bluetooth exchange between two devices. Contact details such as date, duration, and proximity are collected around the handshake.

Encounter: An encounter is an interaction between two people who have the COVIDSafe app who have been in contact of within 1.5 metres for 15 minutes or more. The algorithm change to one minute was implemented on 15 October 2021, resulting data has not been included in this report.

Potential Close Contact: Number of potential close contacts identified after the data of a positive case has been uploaded.