

# Opinion



Shalev Hulio  
Photo: Avital Peleg

## The truth about digital tracking to fight coronavirus

**Opinion:** It is important to appreciate that the historical information for each mobile subscription is already and routinely available to the cellular companies and only includes cellular locations and does not require any collection of information from the device itself

Shalev Hulio | Updated: 03.23.20 , 23:25



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The use of technology in a medical context to monitor the spread of the coronavirus raises concerns about privacy. But using it properly and proportionately will not compromise privacy and can really save lives.

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The biggest coronavirus challenges facing countries are primarily the correct mapping of those infected, the regulation of testing, the prediction of future infections and the subsequent effective provision of medical services.



Israelis wearing masks against coronavirus train in Yarkon Park in Tel Aviv

The decision approved by the Israeli government allows the Ministry of Health to obtain two critical pieces of data to help stem the spread of the virus - locating the places where those patients have been and mapping the people who were in their vicinity.

All that is needed for a reliable and simple epidemiological investigation is - with the knowledge of the patient - to access cellular companies' data and understand where the patient had been in the previous 14 days.

It is important to appreciate that the historical information for each mobile subscription is already and routinely available to the cellular companies.

This information only includes cellular locations for that subscription and does not require any collection of information from the device itself.

In other words, with the exception of retrieving the historical location of the device, there is no listening in on calls and no data, personal information or messages that exist on the device can be gathered.



**An Israeli man gets tested for coronavirus at a drive through testing site in Tel Aviv** (Photo: Magen David Adom rescue service)

Through mapping the path of the patient, we can see the people around them and they can be directly alerted.

So how does all this not violate privacy? The data that is analyzed does not include any identifying information such as name or identification number.

In fact, not even a phone number is collected: The analysis is based on the SIM card number that exists on the device.

Once the analysis is complete, the Ministry of Health will have a fairly accurate statistic of the number of people who were in the vicinity of verified patients, at this stage without any personal information or identification.

The next step is to send a message to people with a high potential for infection who were in the vicinity of the patient and ask them to go into self-isolation.

This will allow the authorities to build a "tree of infection." At present, medical officials are still struggling to track the source of infection for a number of patients.



**Delivering food to elderly housebound residents of Jerusalem** (Photo: Amit Shabi)

Proper mapping of information will mean that the source of infection can be located, which will in turn halt the spread of the epidemic.

Allowing the use of technological tracking is a brave and unpopular decision, but I am convinced that in times of crisis such as the present, it is the right one. Proven technologies must be used to deal with this pandemic and save lives. It is the hour and it is necessary.

*Shalev Hulio is the founder and CEO of NSO Group Technologies*

First published: 23:20 , 03.23.20

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You're a Jerk! And an ignorant one as well.

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