Facebook Expands Coronavirus Symptom Survey Globally

The social media giant is working with Carnegie Mellon University to track the spread of COVID-19, and the company says the data correlates with publicly-available figures.

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Facebook is set to roll out its coronavirus symptom survey, which pops up at the top of the News Feed so people can report any symptoms of COVID-19, to a global audience. The survey is run by health researchers at Carnegie Mellon University and asks users whether they have any coronavirus symptoms: fevers, coughing, shortness of breath, or loss of smell.

In an editorial published in the Washington Post, Mark Zuckerberg said that such data collected through Facebook can help hospitals forecast coronavirus cases and provide insight as to where a serious coronavirus outbreak might occur next. Zuckerberg says that responses to the survey are only sent to health researchers and the data isn't accessible to Facebook.

The survey, which has been running for two weeks at the time of writing, receives around a million responses a week in the United States, and the data reportedly correlates with publicly available data about confirmed coronavirus cases. As such, Facebook decided to roll it out in more countries with help from the University of Maryland. Meanwhile, Carnegie Mellon is building an API so that researchers, governments, and public health officials can easily access the results.

As The Verge reports, Zuckerberg believes global maps could

provide a ‘reality check’ for places where officials are lackluster on preventing COVID-19 spreading: “Some of these governments, frankly, are not excited about the world knowing how many actual cases there might be, or indicators of how it’s spreading in their countries … so getting that data out there is very important,” he said.

Facebook is also fighting the spread of false information surrounding the pandemic on both the social network and photo sharing site Instagram. When false information is found by Facebook’s third-party fact-checkers, the company will “limit its spread,” and send a notification to those who had shared or were attempting to share the information. WhatsApp – also owned by Facebook – is limiting viral message forwarding in order to stop the spread of false information.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/349508