PRESS RELEASE
Biel, 16 April 2020

Help fight the virus now with the Corona Science app

With the Corona Science app, which was launched today, citizens can actively help fight the pandemic – by collecting and anonymously contributing data. With these data, the course of the pandemic and the emotional strain of life under lockdown can be tracked more precisely. Scientists and politicians gain information they need to better plan the return to normality. Developed jointly by Bern University of Applied Sciences BFH and MIDATA Cooperative, the app is supported by the Cantons of Bern and Neuchâtel, eHealth Suisse, opendata.ch and other partners.

Unlike contact-tracing apps, Corona Science aims to enable citizens to collect urgently needed data on COVID-19 as well as on their life situation in lockdown. Anyone can make an active contribution with this app by donating their data anonymously. The data entered by citizens is not analysed by the Corona Science team itself, but is made available to all interested parties in anonymised and aggregated form – in line with the 'open data' principle. It can be used by epidemiologists, researchers or care planners for the fight against the coronavirus pandemic. 'With the anonymised data, the progression of the pandemic can be tracked more precisely in a situation where the public's contact with the health system is limited,' says Serge Bignens, Head of the Institute for Medical Informatics I4MI at BFH. For example, analyses of the Corona Science data can provide more knowledge about the progression of the disease, identify local outbreaks, show the emotional strain on the population during and after the lockdown and help with planning the return to normality. The project has already received broad support from the Cantons of Bern and Neuchâtel, eHealth Suisse, opendata.ch and other partners. Further, the effort of Corona Science is coordinated with the initiative Tracking the Dynamics of COVID-19 (covidtracker.ch); both initiatives complement each other for the fight with their data against the pandemic.

Questions about symptoms and life situation under conditions of lockdown
The Corona Science app regularly asks users about typical symptoms of the COVID-19 disease, such as coughing or loss of smell. Besides data on the coronavirus, the app also collects other information about people's mood and the extra stress they are feeling as a result of the lockdown. It asks, for instance, about working at home, reduced work hours or childcare, and includes further questions relating to measures against the pandemic. 'It's not only about symptoms. Combined with mood data, society can better understand the situation during the lockdown and plan exit strategies,' Bignens explains. In addition, the app links to the relevant information and help resources and can serve as a communication channel to the users.

Full control over your own data
The data are stored in personal accounts on the secure and data-protection-compliant MIDATA platform. It belongs to the citizens who contribute it. 'App users have full control over their data at all times,' Dominik Steiger, Head of Office at the MIDATA Cooperative, explains. 'Among else, this means they can withdraw their consent to share their anonymised data with the open data community at any time,' says Steiger.

The Corona Science project is now dependent on the support of the population. As Serge Bignens points out: 'In this time of crisis, anyone and everyone can make a contribution. Whether you're a health professional or a childminder, whether you're a healthy or sick person who donates their anonymised data helping to fight against and better understand COVID-19.'

Corona Science: Fighting the coronavirus together
The Corona Science app is free and the software is open source. This means that researchers, experts, technology specialists, but also citizens can all support the further development of the app. This has already happened at two online hackathons: #CodeVsCOVID19 from 27–30 March 2020 and #VersusVirus from 3–5 April 2020.

The Corona Science app is not a contact-tracing app. It is not intended to identify contact persons, but rather to provide urgently needed data on people's wellbeing and the progression of the disease. Should a solution for a tracking standard emerge (e.g. PEPP-PT), such a solution could be linked in a manner compliant with data protection. The app is not intended for diagnosis or self-diagnosis, although it does contain links to information and help resources. It also offers the option of creating a user community that can be informed about measures and the disease via the app.

The anonymised and aggregated health and symptom data is made available as open data. All in all, this represents a crucial contribution to data collection relating to COVID-19.

Info and app download:

www.coronascience.ch
(The app is already available for Android. iOS will follow soon.)

Photos:

Mediakit

Contacts:
Prof. Serge Bignens, Head of Institute for Medical Informatics I4MI,
Bern University of Applied Sciences BFH, serge.bignens@bfh.ch, Tel. +41 32 321 67 01

Dr Dominik Steiger, Head of Office, MIDATA Cooperative,
dominik.steiger@midata.coop, Tel. +41 43 539 86 29

Michelle Buchser, Communications Specialist,
Bern University of Applied Sciences BFH, michelle.buchser@bfh.ch, Tel. +41 32 321 62 11

Corona Science is supported by:
Canton of Bern; Canton of Neuchâtel; eHealth Suisse, Bern

Project partners and sponsors:
advocacy ag, Zurich; ahdis ag, Zurich; Atelier Richner, Bern; Bern University of Applied Sciences BFH, Nursing Research, Bern; Citizen Science Center Zurich, Zurich ; Die Schwedin, Biel ; ELCA Informatik AG, Lausanne; EvalueScience AG, Zurich; gfs.bern.ag, Bern; Health Tech Cluster Switzerland, Schwyz; HL7 User Group Switzerland, St. Gallen; opendata.ch, Zurich ; Roche Pharma (Switzerland) Ltd, Basel; santeneXt, Zurich; Swiss Society for Medical Informatics (SSMI), Zurich; Swiss Data Science Center (SDSC), Zurich; Swiss Lung Foundation, Wald.